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LAUREL
CROWNED



AN ICELAND
FISHERMAN
By PIERRE LOTÉ

TALES

LAUREL-CROWNED TALES.

UNIFORM IN STYLE AND PRICE.

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Abdallah: or, The Four-Leaved Shamrock. Translated from the French of ÉDOUARD RENÉ LEFEBVRE-LABOULAYE, by MARY L. BOOTH. 16mo, 232 pages, gilt top.

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VIII.

Paul and Virginia. Translated from the French of BERNARDIN DE SAINT-PIERRE, by MELVILLE B. ANDERSON. 16mo, 218 pages, gilt top.

Viaud, Louis Marie Julien
Julien Viaud
AN

ICELAND FISHERMAN

BY

PIERRE LOTI *up 1000*

Translated from the French

BY ANNA FARWELL DE KOVEN



SIXTH THOUSAND

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

THE difficulties of translation are always great, but never greater than when the task is the reproducing of an emotion which arises from the melody of language rather than from originality of plot or rapid development of incident. But to translate Pierre Loti is no more difficult than to analyze him. He is as yet an unclassified element in literature. The intelligence which admits his limitations in invention and in regularity of expression cannot define or explain away the invincible sorcery which enthralls the emotions. His nature is a rendezvous of contradictions. He is very old and he is very young ; he is as sensitive as a child and as unbelieving as an atheist ; he adores alike the lily of the tropics and the garden-flower of his own home. He has the strength of the developed artist and the irregularity of the amateur. He has experienced and described the extremes of human emotion. But he has two qualities

which remain invariable, — a yearning passion for beauty, and a limpid purity of style. He is as brilliant and realistic an impressionist as any of his countrymen ; but he is more than all a sentimentalist, and never describes a scene without the accompanying emotion which unites it to his soul and ours. The poet's passion for beauty is his own ; but his expression of it is essentially Gallic, as it is never divested of the personal relation to himself. An abstract rapture over the frozen beauties of a Greek vase could never have arisen from the heart of this fascinating egotist. Like all poets, his nature is as deep as a well and as reflective as the mirror of its surface.

The principle of moral choice does not limit the number of images which he reflects, and we are to be congratulated that the roving, seafaring life he leads gives him manifold opportunities to gratify his curiosity and ours. In "*Le Mariage de Loti*," the first of his books, and in "*Pêcheur d'Islande*," his masterpiece, he strikes the extreme notes of his emotional experience and artistic sympathy. In the former — a description of a summer's sojourn in the Islands of Polynesia — his love for the strange and exotic finds its most remarkable utterance. To be told that there are people who under happy conditions of climate can live in the mere luxurious abandonment to the beauty of Nature in her most magnificent moods, is something ; but to be made to see and live with them as this young Alfred de Musset

did, gives us as strange and intense a sensation of remote and almost unimaginable beauty as it is possible to obtain. There are some songs in this book, — love songs and letters from its strange and pitiful barbaric heroine, — which are as full of metaphor as the Song of Solomon, and as fresh from the heart of Nature as the gypsy music of Hungary.

In "*Pêcheur d'Islande*" he tells the simple love story of an Iceland fisherman, and strikes down to the primal roots of human pathos with the old, old tragedy of love and death. His sympathy for the hardships and dangers of this fisherfolk of his own home, described with the unerring familiarity of old acquaintance, appeals to all pure and tender emotions, and proves the inherent nobility of his nature. All the beautiful qualities of his heart and brain have flowered in this work. It may be doubted if any living writer of the French language combines it with such indescribable melody as does Pierre Loti; and nowhere are its fascinating delicacies, its exquisite reserves of sound, and its sensuous and generous vocables more harmoniously fortunate than when he describes the mysterious splendors of the Iceland skies, and the remote and solemn silences of its treacherous icy seas. The realism of this consummate performance is so consistent and so great that the memory of its word-pictures confounds itself in the mind with that of Jules Breton's heroic peasants, and leaves in the heart the lesson of a

deep and large humanity. As he is artist in his word-visions, he is melodist in his word-tones. When Nature rolls a Breton and a Schubert into one, endows him with an invincible and indescribable personal fascination, sets him free to wander over the face of the earth and the sea, and then gives him a voice, it is worth while to listen to what he has to say. It has been the translator's earnest wish to convey to a yet larger number Pierre Loti's most perfect utterance of the romance of pure humanity in the English translation of "*Pêcheur d'Islande*."

A. F. de K.





AN ICELAND FISHERMAN.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

THEY were huge, rough-looking fellows, all five of them, as they sat there drinking, with their elbows on the table, in a dingy, stuffy little den which smelt of brine and of the sea. The place was too low for them, and narrowed down at one end like the inside of a great hollow sea-mew, and with a monotonous, creaking sound, seemed to be rocking gently and drowsily to and fro.

From within no one could have told that outside lay night and the sea, for the single opening in the roof was closed by a wooden hatch-cover, while an old lamp which hung swinging to and fro lit up the place.

There was a fire in the stove, and the steam which rose from their damp clothing, as it dried, mingled with the smoke of their clay pipes.

A heavy table took up nearly the whole cabin, to which it was carefully proportioned, leaving barely room enough for them to get around it, in order to seat themselves on the narrow chests screwed to the oaken walls. Great beams crossed the ceiling above them, which nearly touched their heads; and behind their backs were bunks which seemed hollowed out of the thickness of the wood, and looked like niches in a cave for the dead. The clumsy woodwork was worm-eaten, impregnated with damp and salt, and worn and polished by the rubbing of their hands.

They had been drinking wine and cider from their mugs, and their frank, open faces expressed contentment with life. Now, still seated at the table, they were chatting, Breton fashion, over the questions of love and marriage.

Against a bulkhead at one end of the cabin, mounted on a bracket, a Holy Virgin in *faience* held the place of honor. She was somewhat ancient, this patroness of the sailors, and crudely painted. But china people last longer than real ones; and her dress of red and blue still made a very fresh little bit of color among the dull grays of the poor wooden cabin. She must have heard many an ardent prayer in hours of danger; and some one had nailed at her feet two bouquets of artificial flowers and a rosary.

The five men were dressed alike in thick blue woollen jerseys which covered their bodies and were tucked into the waist-bands of their trousers ; on their heads was a kind of tarpaulin hat, called "sou'wester" from the name of that south-west wind which in our part of the world always brings rain. They were of different ages. The captain might have been forty ; three others ranged from twenty-five to thirty ; while the last, whom they called Sylvestre or Lurlu, was only seventeen. He was already a man in strength and size, and a very thick and curly black beard covered his cheeks ; but his eyes, bluish gray and extremely sweet and innocent in expression, were still those of a child.

Shut up in their dismal den, and crowded close together for lack of room, they seemed nevertheless to be quite happy and content ; and outside was night and the sea, and the wide desolation of dark and fathomless waters. A copper clock fastened against the wall marked eleven o'clock, — eleven in the evening, of course, — and on the wooden roof above could be heard the sound of the falling rain. They were talking together very gayly over this subject of marriage, but without saying anything vulgar or in any way improper. No ; they were discussing only the love affairs of those who were still unmarried, or were probably telling amusing adventures which occurred during their spare

which

the pleasures of courting ; but love among weather-beaten sailors like these is always wholesome, and remains pure on account of its very simplicity.

But Sylvestre meantime was restless over the absence of another sailor whom they called Jean, — a name which the Bretons pronounce “Yann.”

Where indeed was Yann? Was he always at work on deck? Why did he not come down and take his part in the feast?

“Well,” said the captain, “it’s nearly midnight.”

And getting up, he lifted the wooden hatch-cover with his head and called out from there to Yann, while a strange light fell in from above.

“Yann, Yann!” and “Hello! you there!”

Some one answered roughly from without.

This pale, pale light that came through while the hatchway was opened for an instant was very much like that of day. “Nearly midnight.” Nevertheless it was like a ray of sunlight, — a departing twilight ray sent from afar across mysterious mirrors.

When the hole was shut, night came once more, the little hanging lamp began to burn yellow again, and Yann could be heard clattering down the wooden ladder in his clumsy sabots. As he came in, he was obliged to bend himself nearly double like a great bear, for he was almost a giant; and the *fat* make up a face, *the* penetrating

If anything he was a little too much above the ordinary height, and seemed more so, as he carried himself as straight as a ramrod. As he turned toward them at the foot of the ladder, the muscles of his shoulders could be seen standing out in great knots under his blue jersey. He had very expressive, large brown eyes with a look in them which was fiery and untamed.

Sylvestre, putting his arm around this Yann, drew him affectionately toward him like a child. He was betrothed to Yann's sister, and treated him like an elder brother; and Yann, like a good-natured lion, permitted himself to be caressed, smiling and showing his white teeth in reply. His teeth, having more room than is usually the case, seemed a little far apart and quite small. His blond mustache was quite short, although he never shaved it, and curled very closely in two symmetrical little waves over his lips, which were exquisitely beautiful in shape, and then burst into two little tufts on either side of the deep corners of his mouth. The rest of his face was smoothly shaved, and his cheeks were as rosy and as fresh as unpicked fruit.

They filled up their glasses again when Yann sat down, and called the cabin-boy to put fresh tobacco in their pipes and relight them. This gave the boy a chance to take a sly whiff himself. He was a strong young lad, with a round face, a sort of cousin to all the crew, who were all more or less related; and except that his

work was hard enough, he was the spoiled child of the ship.

Yann made him drink a little out of his glass and then they sent him to bed. After this they took up again the great subject of marriage.

"And you, Yann," asked Sylvestre, "when are you going to get married?"

"Aren't you ashamed," said the captain, "a great fellow like you — twenty-seven years old — and not married yet? What must the girls think when they see you?"

But Yann, shrugging his huge shoulders, carelessly replied, —

"Oh, I'll get married some day, but not till I feel like it."

He had just finished his five years of service to the State, this Yann, and it was during this time that as a gunner on board a man-of-war he had learned to speak French and to hold sceptical opinions.

He now began to relate how for his last adventure he had been in love with a singer at a *café chantant* in Nantes.

One evening, just after landing, when he was a little tipsy, he had gone into an alcazar. There was a woman at the door selling enormous bouquets at twenty francs apiece. Without thinking much what he was doing, he bought one and then threw it with a turn of his arm right in the face of the singer on the stage, — partly in admiration, and partly in scorn of the painted doll, whose cheeks he found by far too rosy.

than real cold, and in breathing, tasted strongly of salt. The sea was calm, and the rain had ceased. The shapeless and colorless clouds above seemed to contain a hidden light which came from one knew not whence; one could see quite clearly while feeling yet the presence of the night; and every object was pale with an indefinable whiteness.

The three men standing there had passed all their lives since childhood on these icy seas, in the midst of fantasies of sea and sky as vague and troubled as visions of the night. All this infinite panorama of chaos they were accustomed to watch from their little wooden craft, and their eyes were used to the sight of it, like those of the great birds that fly over the open sea.

The ship rocked slowly at anchor, giving out the same complaint, as monotonous as an old *chanson* of Brittany repeated in a dream by one asleep.

Yann and Sylvestre had rapidly prepared their hooks and lines, while the other man opened a barrel of salt, sharpened his great knife, and sat down to wait behind them. It was not for long, for hardly had they cast their lines into the still and icy water when they hauled them up again heavy with great fish of a glittering gray, like steel. And still the cod took the bait, and the haul went on, rapid, incessant, and in silence. The other man cut them open with his great knife, flattened, salted, and counted them, while behind them, all fresh and dripping, the briny pile which was to

make their fortunes on their return grew larger and larger.

The hours went by monotonously, and without, over the measureless, deserted plains of the sea, the light was slowly changing ; and now it seemed a little less unreal. What had been a wan, pale twilight, like a summer evening at the North Pole, had now, with no intervening night, become an aurora, which all the glittering mirrors of the sea were reflecting in trembling rays of rose.

"You certainly ought to get married, Yann," said Sylvestre, suddenly, with his eyes on the water, very seriously this time. He spoke as if he knew very well of some one in Brittany who had lost her heart to those great brown eyes of his brother ; but he feared to broach lightly so serious a subject.

"I, yes, one of these days I will get married," said Yann, with his disdainful smile, while his eyes flashed ; "but not to any of those country girls. No ! as for me, I shall marry the sea, and I invite you all, everybody on board, to the ball I shall give."

They went on fishing, for they had no time to waste in talking ; they were in the midst of an immense travelling shoal of fish, which had been two days passing, and they were not out of it yet. They had all stayed up the night before, and had caught in thirty hours more than a thousand enormous cod, until their strong arms were weary and they had almost fallen asleep. Sometimes

their bodies only kept awake and went on fishing mechanically, while for a moment their minds floated off to sleep. But this ocean air they were breathing was as pure as in the first days of the world, and so invigorating that their lungs expanded and their cheeks grew rosy in spite of their fatigue.

The morning light, the real light, had finally come, and as in Genesis, it was "divided from the darkness," which seemed to be heaped up over the horizon and to rest there heavily in shadowy masses; and now that one could see so clearly one could easily tell that night had been left behind and that that former radiance had been as strange and vague as the light of a dream.

Here and there in the thick and overhanging sky there were rents like windows in a dome, through which great shafts of golden, rosy light shot down.

The lower clouds lay in a band of deep shadow all about the horizon, infolding the ocean distances in dim obscurity, producing the illusion of an enclosed space; they were like curtains drawn over the infinite, like veils let down to conceal mysteries too gigantic for the imagination of men. This morning, around the little craft which was carrying Yann and Sylvestre, the changing world had taken on the look of a vast cloister, — a sanctuary, where the rays of light which came through the rifts in the temple's dome fell in long

reflected rays upon the motionless water, as on a pavement of marble. And then, little by little, in the growing light another vision appeared from afar, — a towering promontory of gloomy Iceland cut out like a rosy cameo against the dull gray sky.)

Yann's marriage with the sea, — Sylvestre kept thinking of it while he went on fishing, not daring to say another word. He was sorry to hear the sacrament of marriage turned to a jest by his big brother; then, too, it had frightened him, — for he was superstitious.

He had been thinking so long over this marriage of Yann, and he had dreamed that it might be with Gaud Mével, a blond girl of Paimpol, and that he might have the joy of dancing at the feast before he left for his service to the State, — that five years' exile, from which he might never return, and the knowledge of whose inevitable approach was already beginning to weigh upon his heart.

Four o'clock in the morning. The three others, who had been sleeping below, came up together to relieve them. Still half asleep, and taking in deep breaths of the cold air, they climbed up, pulling on their long boots on the way, and half shutting their eyes, which were dazzled by the million reflected rays of the white morning light.

Then Yann and Sylvestre made a rapid breakfast of biscuits, breaking them with a mallet and munching them with a great deal of noise, laugh-

ing at finding them so hard. They had become quite gay again at the prospect of going down to sleep and getting warm in their bunks ; and with their arms around each other they danced away toward the hatchway to the air of an old song.

But before they disappeared down the hole they stopped to play with a certain "Turk," — the ship's dog, a young Newfoundland, who still had the sprawling awkward paws of a puppy. They poked at him and teased him, while he snapped at their hands like a wolf, and finally ended in hurting them. Then Yann, with a flash of anger in his changeable eyes, gave him a blow which knocked him over and made him howl.

Yann had a good heart, but when his passions were aroused, a pleasant caress with him was something very near to brutal violence.

CHAPTER II.

THEIR boat was called the "Marie," Captain Guermeur ; and every year when the great season of cod-fishing came round, she set sail for those dangerous icy regions whose summers know no nights.

She was very old, like her patroness, the china Virgin. Her thick sides, with their timbers of oak, were seamed, rough, and impregnated with brine and dampness, but stout and whole withal,

and exhaling the refreshing odor of pitch. When lying to, she had a heavy look, with her massive build ; but when the great west winds began to blow she regained her strength and lightness like a sea-mew, whom the wind awakes. And then she had a way of breasting the waves and bounding over them more lightly than many a younger ship designed with all modern improvements in shape and build.

As for the crew, the six men and the cabin-boy, they were "Icelanders," — a hardy race of sailors inhabiting principally the country of Paimpol and Tréguier, and among whom the profession of cod-fishing is handed down sacredly from father to son.

They had hardly ever seen a summer in France.

At the end of every winter, in the port of Paimpol, with the other fishermen they receive the benediction of departure.

For this fête-day an altar, always in the same way, is built on the quay. It is made to imitate a rocky grotto, and in the midst, surrounded by trophies of anchors, nets, and oars, sits enthroned the Virgin, patroness of sailors, who has come out of her church for their sake. Sweet and impassive she sits, with the same lifeless eyes, which from generation to generation have seen departing those happy ones for whom the season would prove fortunate, and the unhappy, destined never to return.

The Holy Sacrament, followed in slow procession by wives and mothers, sisters and sweet-hearts, makes the tour of the harbor, where all the Iceland fishing-boats, drawn up ready to sail, dip their flags as it passes ; and the priest, stopping before each one, says the prayers and makes the gestures which give the blessing.

Then they depart like a fleet, leaving the country nearly empty of husbands, lovers, and sons ; and as they sail away the crews sing together in a loud and ringing chorus the hymns to " Marie, Star of the Sea."

Every year there are the same ceremonials of departure, the same farewells.

And then begins again the life on the open sea, the isolation but for three or four rough companions on the moving ship in the midst of the icy waters of the north sea.

Just now they were returning, for the Virgin Star of the Sea had protected the ship which bore her name.

The end of August was the time for their return. But the " Marie " followed the custom of many of the Icelanders, which was to touch merely at Paimpol, and afterward to go down into the Gulf of Gascogne to find a good market for their fish, and to buy salt for the next campaign in the salt marshes of its low Sand Islands.

In these southern ports, still warm with the sun, the hardy sailors scatter for a day or two, — eager for pleasure, and intoxicated by the remain-

ing fragment of the summer, the touch of the earth, and the milder air.

And then with the first frosts of autumn they return to their homes in Paimpol, or in the country of Gaëlo round about, to busy themselves with love affairs and family affairs, with marriages and births. Almost always they find little new-comers, whom their fathers have never seen, waiting for their return to be christened. They have need of many children, this race of fishermen, whom Iceland devours.

CHAPTER III.

AT Paimpol, one beautiful Sunday evening in June, two women were very busy writing a letter.

They were sitting before a large open window, on whose old and massive granite sill was arranged a row of flower-pots.

As they leaned over the table they both seemed to be young; one wore a very large head-dress after the fashion of long ago, and the other a very small one, of the new shape which the women of Paimpol had adopted, — two sweet-hearts, one would have said, concocting together a tender message to some handsome fisherman.

The one who was dictating — she of the large cap — suddenly raised her head as if thinking of something to say, when, lo! she was old, very

old, in spite of her girlish figure seen thus from behind, under her little brown shawl; indeed quite old, — a good grandmother of at least seventy years, — but still pretty in a way, and fresh-looking, with the very ruddy cheeks such as some old people have a way of retaining. Her cap, coming low over the forehead and crown of her head, was composed of two or three large horns of muslin, which seemed to emerge one out of the other, falling finally over the nape of her neck. Her venerable face was admirably framed in all this whiteness and these rigid nunlike folds. Her eyes were very sweet in expression and full of honest goodness. She had not a trace of a tooth left, and when she smiled, the round bare gums which one saw instead were like a child's.

In spite of her chin, which had come to resemble, as she often said herself, "the point of a sabot," her profile was by no means entirely spoiled by the years, and one could see still that it must have been as pure and regular as a Madonna's.

She was looking out of the window now, thinking what more she could say to amuse her grandson.

Surely in all the country of Paimpol there was not to be found so dear an old dame as she, or one who could find so much that was funny to say about one thing and another, or even about nothing at all.

There were several impossible tales already in

this letter, but nothing unkind, for there was nothing unkind in her heart.

The other, seeing she had nothing more to say, had begun to write carefully the address, —

A MONSIEUR MOAN, SYLVESTRE,

*On board the "Marie," Captain Guermeur,
in the Sea of Iceland, near Reikiavik.*

Then she also lifted her head, and asked, —


"Is that all, Grandmother Moan?"

She was young, adorably young (about twenty, one would say), and very blond, which is rare among this brown race of Bretons, — very fair indeed, with violet eyes and nearly black eyelashes. Her eyebrows, which were as blond as her hair, looked as if they had been retouched in the middle by a reddish line of a darker color, which gave an expression of will and force to her face. Her profile, although a little short, was very noble and beautiful, the nose, as in the Greek type, continuing the line of the forehead with absolute correctness. A very deep dent just under her lower lip accentuated its lines most deliciously, and from time to time, when she was much occupied with some thought, she would bite this lip with her white upper teeth, making it still more rosy. There was a certain air of pride and dignity about her slight figure, which came to her from her ancestors, the brave Iceland sailors, and in her eyes was an expression both obstinate and sweet.

Her cap was made in the shape of a shell, and

came down very low over her forehead, binding it very closely, then, brought up quite high on either side, it showed two thick, long yellow locks rolled into little coils over her ears, — a very antique fashion of arranging the hair, which gives an old-time look to the women of Paimpol.

One could easily see that she had been brought up in a different way from the poor old woman whom she called “grandmother,” but who was in fact only a great-aunt who had met with misfortunes.

She was the daughter of M. Mével, an old Ice-lander, who was something of a pirate, and had grown rich through his dangerous traffic on the high seas.  This pretty room where the letter had just been written belonged to her; the bed was quite new, and decorated in city fashion with muslin curtains bordered with lace, and on the thick walls was a light-colored paper which softened the irregularities of the stone. On the ceiling there was a coat of whitewash covering the enormous beams which showed the age of the cottage. It was in fact just the house of a well-to-do bourgeois; and the windows looked out on the old weather-stained market-place of Paimpol, where also religious festivals were held.


“It’s finished, Grandmother Yvonne? You have nothing more to say to him?”

“No, my child; only add, please, my regards to young Gaos.”

Young Gaos, otherwise Yann.

She colored deeply, the proud young beauty, as she wrote this name.

When she had put it at the bottom of the page, in a running hand, she got up and turned away her head, as if to look at something very interesting outside in the market-place. As she stood up, she seemed rather tall, and her figure looked finely moulded, like that of a woman of fashion, in a dress which fitted without a wrinkle.

In spite of her cap, she had the air of a young lady ; and her hands, without having that dainty and helpless littleness which fashion has made a beauty, were white and refined, never having done any rough work.  It is true she began by being a little tomboy, running barefoot in the water, having no mother, and left to run almost wild during the fishing seasons, when her father had gone to Iceland ; pretty, rosy, uncombed, wilful, and headstrong, she had grown up strong and healthy in the fresh, sharp air of the Channel. During this time she was taken care of in the summers by poor Grandmother Moan, who left Sylvestre in her charge during her hard days of work among the towns-folk of Paimpol.

She adored this baby who had been committed to her care, like a little mother, although she was hardly eighteen months older than he, who was as dark as she was fair, and as submissive and good-natured as she was impulsive and capricious. She often recalled this beginning of her life, this girl whom money and city life had not spoiled.

It came back to her mind like a far-away dream of wild liberty, like an echo of a vague and mysterious time, when the beaches were wider, and the cliffs surely much more gigantic.

While she was still very young, only about five or six years old, her father (who having made some money had become a ship-broker) took her with him first to Saint-Brieuc and afterward to Paris.

From little Gaud, she had become Mademoiselle Marguerite, — a tall and serious girl with a grave look in her eyes. Always a good deal left to herself, although in a different way from when she ran wild on the Breton sands, she still retained the wilful disposition of her childhood. What she knew about life she had picked up haphazard and almost unconsciously, but an innate dignity and an unerring instinct had been her safeguards. Every now and then she had little fits of audacity, when she surprised people by the daring things she said to their very faces. When young men looked at her, she looked them back full and square with her clear honest eyes ; but her look was so fearless and so indifferent that they could not misunderstand her, and could see at once that she was an honest woman with a heart as pure as her face was sweet.

With city life her dress had changed a good deal more than she had herself ; and although she still wore her cap, which the women of Brittany are loath to give up, she had learned very quickly to dress herself in quite another way. And the

unconfined figure of the little fisher-girl, as it developed in the vigor and perfection which her childhood by the sea had given her, had become smaller at the waist by the use of stays.

> She went back every year with her father to Brittany, but in the summer only, as if to a watering-place, and took up again for a time the associations of her childhood and her name of Gaud (which is Breton for Marguerite). (And she was then) a little curious perhaps to see those Icelanders of whom she had heard so much, who were always away, and from whose number year by year a few more were always missing ; and she was ever hearing a great deal about this "Iceland" which seemed to her then like some far-off abyss, where he whom she now loved had gone. And then one fine day she had been brought back to live among these fishermen through a caprice of her father, who wished to end his days there as a good citizen of Paimpol.

The good old grandmother, so poor and so neat, thanked her and went away as soon as the letter had been read over again and sealed up in its envelope. She lived quite far away, at the beginning of the country of Ploubazlanec, in a hamlet near the sea, in a cottage where she and her children and grandchildren after her had been born. As she went through the village, she nodded familiarly to many people who said "Good-evening" to her ; she was one of the

oldest inhabitants of the country, and the last remnant of a brave and respected family.

By wonders of care and pains she managed to look almost well-dressed in her poor mended gowns, which were so old they could scarcely hold together. She wore the little brown shawl of the women of Paimpol, which was her best, over which for more than sixty years had fallen the muslin folds of her cap; it was her own wedding shawl, first blue, then dyed for the wedding of her son Pierre, since then kept for Sundays, and still quite presentable.

She walked erect, not at all like an old woman, and really, in spite of her chin turning up a little too much, her eyes were so pleasant and her profile so fine that one could not help thinking her pretty. One could see that she was very much respected from the way people greeted her.

On her way she went by the house of her "gallant,"—a quondam lover of hers and a cabinet-maker by trade, who now at eighty years of age passed his time seated at his door, while his sons worked at the bench. He never got over it, they said, that she would not have him either for a first or a second husband; but time had turned his disappointment into a comical kind of feeling, half friendly, half spiteful, and he always called out to her as she went by, "Well, my dear, when shall I come to take your measure?"

She thanked him, saying that she had not made up her mind to order that particular garment yet.

The fact was that the old man, whose manner of jesting was somewhat ponderous, meant a certain arrangement of pine boards which is the last of our earthly attire.

“Oh, well, whenever you wish ; don’t disturb yourself, my dear, only you understand.”

He had already made the same joke half a dozen times, and to-day she could hardly laugh at ~~it~~ [>] she felt so tired and so broken with her life of incessant toil ; and she was thinking of her dear grandson, the last one she had left, who after his return from Iceland would have to go off to “service.” Five years ! Perhaps he might even have to go to China, to the war ! Would she still be there when he returned ? A sharp pain went through her heart at the thought. No, certainly, she was not as happy as she seemed, this poor old woman ; and her face began to work as if she were going to cry.

Could it be, was it true, then, that they were going to take him away from her, her last grandson ? And would she, alas ! be left to die alone, without seeing him again ?

It is true that something had been done by some gentlemen in the town whom she knew, to have him exempted from duty, he being the only support of his poor old grandmother, who would soon be unable to earn her living. But the attempt had not succeeded, on account of that other, Jean Moan, the deserter, — an elder brother of Sylvestre, who was never spoken of in

the family, but who was living, nevertheless, somewhere in America, depriving his younger brother of the privilege of military exemption.

And then, besides, they brought up as an objection the poor little pension she received as a sailor's widow ; they did not think she was poor enough.

When she had gotten home, she said her prayers at length for all her dead sons and grandsons, and then she prayed with earnest faith for her little Sylvestre and tried to go to sleep ; but she kept thinking about this garment of pine boards, and she was terribly oppressed in her heart to feel so old when he was going away.

But the girl remained seated at the window, watching the golden reflections of the setting sun on the granite walls, and the dusky swallows wheeling in the sky.

Paimpol is always very quiet in these long May evenings, even on Sundays. The young girls, who have not a soul to make love to them even a little, wander about in twos and threes, dreaming of their sweethearts in Iceland. — "My regards to young Gaos."

It had disturbed her sentence as
thinking

ing about with the other girls of her own age and her own former position. And then, when he came out of the café and strolled about with his pipe, in company with two or three old salts like himself, he liked to see her up there framed in her granite window among the flowers — his daughter, the mistress of his rich and comfortable home.

“Young Gaos,” — in spite of herself she looked off toward that ocean which she could not see, but whose near presence she felt, at the foot of the narrow alleys through which the boatmen come and go.

And her thoughts went out over the fathomless depths of that mighty enchantress, — the ever fascinating and devouring sea, — away over there to the Polar seas, where the “Marie,” Captain Guerneur, was sailing.

What a strange fellow was this Yann Gaos, now always evading her, although he had once advanced with such daring and such sweetness!

Then in a long revery she went over in her mind all that had happened the year before when she returned to Brittany. One morning in December, on a dark night, the Paris train left them, bound for Quingamp, just as the cold wind came through the mist.

it gave her the sensation of stepping all at once into the "long ago," — into the dim vistas of the past. It was so still after Paris! The people going quietly to and fro in the mist, about their little affairs, seemed to belong to another world! And the dismal granite houses were dark with moisture and the shadows of the departing night.

All these Breton scenes which she loved now so much on account of Yann, seemed sad and desolate enough that morning. The thrifty housewives were already astir, and through the open doors she caught glimpses of old-fashioned rooms with wide chimneys, where the old people, just out of their beds, and still in their night-caps, were quietly sitting. As soon as it had grown a little lighter, she went into the church to say her prayers. And how vast and shadowy the great nave seemed to her; and how different from the churches of Paris, with its rude columns, worn at the base by the centuries, and its cave-like smell of age and saltpetre! In a deep corner behind some columns a taper was burning, with a woman kneeling before it, doubtless making a vow; the light of its slender flame was lost in the dim spaces under the arches. And suddenly there came over her the echo of a feeling long since forgotten, — that kind of gloomy fear which she used to feel when she was quite little, and they brought her on winter mornings for early Mass to the church of Paimpol.

She was certainly not sorry to leave Paris, although there were so many beautiful and amusing

things to be seen there. In the first place she felt almost cooped up there, — she, in whose veins ran the blood of rovers of the deep. And then she felt strange and out of place. The women of Paris were made differently from her, with their small waists and artificially large hips ; they had a different way of walking, moving along in their whaleboned dresses, and she was too sensible ever to try to copy them in the least. She found herself ill at ease in the streets of Paris, with her caps which she ordered every year from Paimpol, not being conscious that if people turned very often to look at her, it was because she was so charming.

She had seen distinguished-looking people whom she admired, but she knew them to be unapproachable ; and from the others among the lower classes, who would have been glad of her acquaintance, she held herself disdainfully aloof, not thinking them worthy of it.

So she had lived without friends, almost without companionship other than that of her father, who was often preoccupied and often away. No, she did not regret a life of such solitude and exile.

But, nevertheless, on this first day she had been painfully surprised by the roughness of this Brittany in midwinter ; and the thought that they were going four or five hours more by carriage to bury themselves still deeper in this melancholy country before they would arrive at Paimpol, disturbed and depressed her.

So all the afternoon of the gray winter's day she and her father had travelled on in a little dilapidated old diligence, open to all the winds of heaven, passing at twilight through dismal little villages beneath naked, dripping trees.

Soon the lanterns had to be lit, and then there was nothing more to be seen except two rays of green Bengal light which seemed to be running on either side of the horses, which were the lights of their lanterns cast along the interminable hedges by the roadside. But why this green foliage in winter?

Astonished at first, she leaned out to look more closely, and then it seemed as if she remembered.

The furze, — the same furze of the cliffs and the paths, which never grows yellow in the country of Paimpol. And all at once a milder breeze began to blow which she thought she remembered also, and which smelt of the sea.

Toward the end of their journey she had been thoroughly aroused and interested by a thought which suddenly occurred to her.

"To be sure, since we have come in winter this time, I shall see those handsome fishermen of Iceland."

In December they were sure to be there back again, — brothers, sweethearts, lovers.

And her mind had been busy with this thought, while her feet were freezing in the wagon.

And see them indeed she did, and had lost her heart to one of them.

CHAPTER IV.

THE first time she ever saw Yann was the day after her arrival, at the feast of the "Pardon," of the Icelanders, which occurs on the 8th of December, — the feast-day of Our Lady of Good News, patroness of fishermen, — a little while after the procession, when the dark streets were still hung with white draperies on which had been fastened ivy and holly, the foliage and flowers of winter. †

At this feast the rejoicing seemed a little forced and boisterous under the melancholy sky, — a joy without gayety, made up of recklessness and defiance, of physical vigor and alcohol, and over which hung, less disguised than elsewhere, the universal menace of death.

Great noise in Paimpol; sound of bells and of priests.

and monotonous songs in the taverns,

partly on account of their usual gait, and partly because already a little drunk, and after their long absence at sea, looking curiously at the women.

Groups of girls in white muslin caps, breasts heaving, and beautiful eyes filled with the dreams of the summer; old granite houses shutting in the swarming crowd; old roofs telling of their centuries of struggle with the west winds, and with the fogs and the rains, with all that comes from the sea, telling also of the warm human episodes they had sheltered, ancient adventures of daring and of love.

And over all was a feeling of religious sentiment, a sense as of other years, and a reverence for ancient observances, for the protecting symbols and the white and immaculate Virgin. Beside the taverns was the church, its steps strewn with leaves, its shadowy portal open wide, with its odor of incense, its tapers glimmering in the darkness, and the votive offerings of the sailors hung everywhere over the sacred walls. And there side by side were girls with their lovers, sweethearts of missing sailors, and widows of the lost and shipwrecked, with their long black shawls and little crêpe caps, coming out of the chapel for the dead and passing silently with downcast eyes through all this noisy life, like a sinister warning.

And over there very near by was the sea, the eternal sea, — the great nurse and the great de-

stroyer of these vigorous generations of men, she too busy and unquiet, making her noise, taking her part in the feast.

↓ Gaud received a confused impression of all this jumble of things. ↘ Excited and smiling, she was nevertheless oppressed at heart, and felt a sort of shuddering presentiment take possession of her at the thought that this country had now become her own for good and all. ↓ In the market-place, where there were shows going on and mountebanks performing, she walked about with her friends, who told her, right and left, the names of the young men of Paimpol and Ploubazlanec. Standing in front of a group of these singers of old ballads, with their backs turned toward them, were two or three Icelanders.

Then, noticing one of them who had the figure of a giant and shoulders which were almost too large, she remarked quietly with a touch of irony, —

“There is one who is tall enough !”

Her manner of saying this almost implied, —

“What a lumbering thing a husband of that size would be for his wife to have around !”

He turned around as if he had heard her, looking her over from head to foot with a rapid glance which seemed to say, —

“And who is that fine girl, she with the Paimpol cap, whom I have never seen before ?”


Then he dropped his eyes quickly for politeness' sake, seeming again to be entirely occu-

pied with the singers, and only showing the back of his head, with its dark and curly locks clustering over his neck.

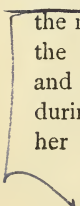
Although Gaud asked quite naturally the names of a number of others, she did not dare ask his. That beautiful profile which she could just see, that proud and almost haughty glance, those brilliant quick eyes of his, with their tawny gleam, had deeply impressed and almost frightened her. ✓ But it was this very Yann Gaos, this friend of Sylvestre of whom she had heard so much at the Moans'; the evening of this same fête-day she and her father had met him and Sylvestre walking along arm in arm, and they had stopped to bid them good-evening. †

As for little Sylvestre, he had immediately become a sort of brother to her again. As they were cousins, they had continued to say "thou" to each other. True, she hesitated a little at first before this great youth of seventeen with his black beard; but his clear, childish eyes were just as of old, and she soon became so used to him that it seemed as if she had never lost sight of him. When he came to Paimpol, she kept him to dinner as a matter of course, and he always ate with a very good appetite, having none too much to eat at home.

To tell the truth, Yann had not been so very polite to her at this first introduction, at the corner of a little gray, dusty street, all over-arched with green branches. He had been compelled



to take off his hat, which he did with a very graceful although slightly embarrassed manner; then, having looked her over with his rapid glance, he turned his eyes away, seeming to be sorry they had met, and in a hurry to go on his way. A high west wind, which had risen during the procession, had strewn the ground with branches from the box-trees, and spread dark gray curtains over the sky. It all came back to Gaud very plainly as she recalled it, — the melancholy closing in of the night at the end of the fête; the white sheets decked with flowers flapping with the wind; along the walls the noisy groups of Icelanders, — men of winds and tempests, who ran singing into the taverns, hurrying to escape the rain; and then this great fellow standing there before her, turning away his head as if he was bored, and sorry he had met her. What a change had come over her since then! And what a difference between the noise and confusion of that twilight ending of the fête and the tranquillity which now reigned; and how silent and empty was this same Paimpol during the long May twilight which kept her at her window, dreaming, in love, and alone!



CHAPTER V.

✓THE second time she saw him was at a wedding. Yann had been assigned to walk with her. At first she thought she would not like it very well, to have to promenade along the street with this great fellow, whom everybody looked at on account of his size, and who besides would probably not have a word to say to her on the way. And then really she was afraid of him, with his haughty indifferent ways.

At the appointed hour everybody had assembled for the procession, and Yann had not yet appeared. Time went on ; he did not come ; and they were beginning to talk about not waiting any longer for him. Then she saw that it was for him alone that she had made herself pretty, and that it made no difference to her what other young men were there ; without him the fête and the ball would be nothing to her.

Finally he made his appearance, dressed in his best, and made his excuses quite naturally to the parents of the bride, saying that a great shoal of fish had quite unexpectedly been signalled from England, as being expected to pass that night a little off D'Aurigny, and that then every boat at Ploubazlanec had been hastily gotten under sail. There was great excitement in the villages around, — women running to the wine-shops in search of

their husbands, pushing them even to make them run, making a great to-do themselves at helping the crews and hoisting the sails ; in short, there was a regular hubbub in the place.

Yann told his story easily and fluently to the people who stood around, with gestures peculiar to himself, with flashing eyes, and a pleasant smile which showed his brilliant white teeth. The better to express the hurry of the getting ready for sea he gave from time to time between his sentences a curious prolonged little *hou*, which is a way sailors have of expressing the idea of speed, and sounds like the whistling of the wind.

He himself had been obliged to look in haste for a substitute, and to get him accepted by the captain of the vessel to whom he had engaged himself for the winter season. This was the reason why he had been late ; and because he had not wanted to miss the wedding he would have to lose all his share of the haul. His explanation was quite satisfactory to his audience, fishermen like himself, and nobody dreamed of blaming him ; of course every one knows that everything in life depends more or less on the chances of the sea, and is subject to the changes of the weather and the mysterious migrations of the fish. * The other Icelanders who were there only regretted not having been told in time, as the men of Ploubazlanec were to take advantage of that chance of fortune which was passing by on the open sea.

It was too late then, — so much the worse, — and they had nothing to do but to offer their arms to the girls. ✓ The violins struck up and the procession started merrily on its way.

At first Yann had only paid her those idle little compliments with which one would naturally address a young girl whom one knew but slightly, at a wedding. They were the only ones who were strangers to each other among the couples at the wedding, and in fact, besides them there were only relatives and fiancés in the procession. ✕ There were two or three pairs of lovers too, for they get on very fast in love-making in the country of Paimpol, and they usually marry their first loves.

But in the evening, during the dancing, when they had begun to talk again about the passing of this great shoal of fish, suddenly looking straight into her eyes he made this unexpected remark, “There is no one else in Paimpol — and even in the world — who could have made me miss that trip ; no, there is certainly no one else who could have kept me from my fishing, *Made-moiselle Gaud.*”

At first she was astonished that this fisherman should dare to speak thus to her, — to her who was almost the queen of the ball, — and then, pleased and fascinated, she finally answered, “Thank you, *Monsieur Yann*, I too would rather be with you than with any one else.”

That was all ; but from that moment till the end

of the ball they spoke to each other in a tone at once lower and more sweet.

They danced in the old-fashioned way to the music of a violin, the same couples being almost always together. When he came back to her after having danced with somebody else out of politeness, they smiled at each other like old friends and took up their confidential conversation where they had left it. Yann was telling her quite simply about his fisherman's life, of his hardships and his wages, and of the hard time his parents had had to bring up the fourteen little Gaoses, of whom he was the eldest. At present they were in a little easier circumstances, particularly on account of a wreck which their father had come across in the Channel, and which he had sold for ten thousand francs to the State. That had enabled them to put an upper story on their house, which was at the extremity of the province of Ploubazlanec, quite at the end of the world, in the hamlet of Pors-Even, with a beautiful view over the Channel. "It's hard enough," he said, "this life of an Iceland fisherman, to start in February for a country like that, where it's so cold and so dark, and the sea so rough."

Gaud went slowly over all their conversation at the ball, which she remembered as if it were yesterday, as she watched the May night closing in gently over Paimpol. If Yann had had no idea of marriage, why had he told her all these details about his life, which she had listened to almost

as if she were engaged to him? He certainly did not seem like a man who would want to tell his private affairs to every one.

"It's a good enough trade, all the same," he said, "and I shall never change it for any other. Some years I make eight hundred francs, sometimes twelve hundred, which they give me when we get back, and which I take to my mother."

"You give it to your mother, Monsieur Yann?"

"Why, yes. All of it, always. It's the custom among us Icelanders, Mademoiselle Gaud. [He said this as if it were a duty, and quite the natural thing.] And as for me, you would not believe it, but I scarcely ever have any money. On Sundays when I come to Paimpol, Mother gives me a little. It's the same with us all. And this year Father ordered me these new clothes, without which I should not have wanted to come to the wedding. Oh, no! I should not have come to offer you my arm in my last year's clothes."

These new clothes of Yann did not seem so very elegant to her, who had been accustomed to see the well-dressed Parisians. The very short jacket was open over a waistcoat of a somewhat old-fashioned cut; but the figure underneath was a model of perfection, and he danced superbly.

Every time he said anything to her he looked her smilingly full in the face to see what she thought of it. And what a frank, honest look there was in his eyes as he told her all this, so that she would be sure to know that he was not rich!

And she too smiled back, still looking in his eyes, answering little, but listening with her whole soul, more and more astonished, and more and more drawn toward him. And what a mixture he was of almost brute force and sweet-tempered childishness ! His deep voice, which with others was brusque and decided, became as he talked with her more and more gentle and caressing. It was for her alone that it could thrill with such sweetness, like the soft strains of a stringed instrument.

And what a curious and unexpected thing it was to find this great fellow, with his indifferent ways and his huge size, always treated at home like a little child, and thinking it quite natural, and although he had travelled the world over, and been through all kinds of dangers, still retaining this respectful and absolute obedience to his parents !

Gaud compared him with others, with two or three coxcombs of Paris, — shopmen, clerks, and the like, — who had persecuted her with their attentions on account of her money ; and he seemed to her to be the best as well as the handsomest man she had ever known. To put herself on more equal terms with him, she had told him that they too had not always been so comfortably off ; that her father had begun by being an Iceland fisherman, and had still much affection for the Icelanders ; and that she herself remembered running barefoot when she was quite little — on the sands — after the death of her poor mother.

Oh, that night of the ball, — that lovely night, the one decisive night of her life, — it was already quite long past, since that was in December and now it was May! All those handsome dancers were off there fishing now, — scattered over the Iceland sea, and still seeing clearly by the pale sunlight in their limitless solitude, while the darkness was gently falling over the land of Brittany.

Gaud still stayed at the window. The market-place of Paimpol, almost shut in by ancient houses, seemed more and more gloomy and deserted as the night came on, and there was scarcely a sound to be heard.

Above the houses, the still, luminous skies seemed to lift and divide themselves more and more from earthly things, which now at this twilight hour seemed to combine into one black silhouette of old roofs and gables. Now and then one could hear a window or a door shutting, and some old salt with a rolling gait coming out of a tavern and disappearing down the little dark streets, or some belated girls coming home from their walk, with bouquets of May-flowers. One of these last, who was a friend of Gaud, said good-evening to her as she passed, and with extended arm held out to her a branch of hawthorn, as if to let her smell it. She could still see through the clear shadow its little branches of white flowers. There was also another soft fragrance rising from the gardens and courtyards all around, — the perfume of honeysuckle blooming on the

granite walls mingled with a faint odor of seaweed from the harbor. The last bats slid through the air with a silent flight, like things in a dream.

Gaud had spent many an evening at this window looking out on the deserted market-place, dreaming of the absent Icelanders, and thinking always about this ball.

It had become very warm toward the end of the wedding, and many heads began to turn. She remembered Yann dancing with other women or girls whom he ought to have cared more or less about. She remembered how coolly and condescendingly he replied to their advances. How different he was with them !

He danced beautifully, holding himself as straight as a forest oak, and turning both lightly and gracefully, with his handsome head thrown back. His thick brown curls fell a little over his forehead as he danced ; and Gaud, who was rather tall herself, felt them touch her cap as he leaned over to hold her better in a rapid waltz.

From time to time Yann would point to his little sister Marie and Sylvestre, who were engaged, and always danced together. And he smiled very pleasantly to see the two young things so proper and reserved, bowing respectfully to each other and saying very pretty things, no doubt, very timidly and almost in a whisper. He would not have wished it otherwise, of course, but it was nevertheless very amusing to him, rover and adventurer as he was, to see them so innocent and good. And

he would smile confidentially at Gaud, as much as to say, "How nice our little brother and sister are, and yet how funny it is to watch them!"

There was much embracing at the end of the ball, — brotherly kisses, cousinly kisses, kisses of lovers, all given full on the lips before everybody in the most frank and simple manner possible. Yann did not kiss Gaud, of course; the daughter of M. Mével would not permit anything like that. He only held her a little more tightly perhaps during the last waltzes; and she did not resist, but rather permitted it, giving herself up unreservedly. In this sudden whirl of deep and delicious emotion in which she was so completely drawn toward him, the natural impulses of a young woman probably counted for something; but it was her heart which first went out to him.

"See the bold thing, the way she is looking at him!" remarked two or three pretty girls, who held their eyes modestly cast down under their blond or dark eyelashes, but who had among the dancers at least one lover, and probably two. And in fact she did look at him a good deal, but she had this excuse, that he was the first and only young man she had ever noticed in her life.

And when they parted, as the ball finally broke up in the early frosty morning, they bade each other good-by in by no means an ordinary way, but more like two lovers, who would meet on the morrow. And then, on her way home she had crossed this same market-place with her father,

not tired at all, but joyful and keenly alive, feeling that it was happiness enough to exist, delighting in the frosty mist outside and the pale gray dawn, and finding a new charm and a new pleasure in everything.

The May night had long since quite closed down. The windows had all been shut, one by one, with a little rattle of their latches ; but Gaud still stayed there, leaving her own window open.

The last few passers-by were sure to say, as they made out the white shape of her cap in the darkness, "There 's a girl who 's certainly dreaming of her lover." And it was true ; she was dreaming of him and longing so to cry ! Her little white teeth kept biting her lips, constantly smoothing out the little fold which underlined the lower contour of her fresh young mouth ; and still she gazed out into the darkness of the night, beholding only visions.

But after the ball, why had she not seen him again ? What could have made the change in him ? When she met him by chance, he turned away those quick and brilliant eyes, and looked as if he wanted to avoid her. She had often talked it over with Sylvestre, who could not understand it either.

"But you will have to marry him all the same, Gaud," he said, "if your father will let you, for you won't find another fellow in the country like him. He is very good, I can assure you, although he may not seem so. He almost never gets

drunk. He is a little obstinate once in a while, that's true ; but at heart no one is kinder than he. You really can't think how good he is, and such a sailor ! Why, the captains quarrel every fishing season to see who shall get him."

As far as her father's permission was concerned, she was sure of getting that, for she always had her own way. It mattered little that Yann was not rich ; a sailor such as he would only need a little loan for six months or so, to learn the coast, and he would be a captain himself to whom any ship-owner would be glad to intrust his ship. It made no difference that he was so nearly a giant in size ; it might be a defect in a woman to be too large and strong, but it does not detract at all from good looks in a man. She had made inquiries, besides, without seeming to at all, of the country girls, who know everybody's love affairs, and no one had heard of his being engaged to any one ; but without seeming to care more for one than another, he went about right and left among the girls in Lézardrieux as well as in Paimpol.

One Sunday evening, very late, she saw him pass under her window, escorting, with his arm around her waist, a certain Jeannie Caroff, who was undoubtedly a very pretty girl, but whose reputation was none of the best ; and how cruelly that had hurt her !

They told her too that he had a very violent temper, and that one night when he was drunk

in a certain café in Paimpol which the Icelanders frequent, that he had broken in a door which they would not open for him, with a heavy marble table. All that she forgave him ; everybody knows how sailors will act sometimes when the fit takes them. But if he really had a good heart, why had he sought her out when she had no thought of him, only to leave her afterward ? Why had he cared to look at her all one night with that pleasant smile of his which seemed so frank, and to speak to her with that sweet voice, confiding in her as if she were his sweetheart ? And now she could love no other. She could never change. Long ago, in this self-same place, when she was still a child, they used to tell her that she was a naughty little thing, and the most obstinate child that ever was, and so she had remained. Beautiful girl as she was, with her serious and slightly haughty ways, nobody had tried to change her, and at heart she was just the same.

The whole of the last winter, after the ball, she had passed in the expectation of seeing him again ; and he did not even come to bid her good-by before leaving for Iceland. Now that he had gone, she had no longer any interest in anything ; the time dragged slowly on toward that return in the autumn, for which she had made so many plans to unravel the whole mystery and have done with it.

Eleven by the town clock. It rang out with

that curious tone that bells have in still spring nights. Eleven o'clock at Paimpol is very late indeed, and Gaud shut her window, and lit her lamp to go to bed.

Perhaps it was only his bad manners, or because he was so proud and afraid of being refused because she was rich. She had already made up her mind to ask him quite simply what was the matter; but Sylvestre thought it would not do, that it would not be nice for a young girl to seem so forward. People in Paimpol had already criticised her dress and manners.

Gaud took off her clothes slowly and absently as if lost in a dream. First her muslin cap, and then her pretty dress, made in city style, which she threw carelessly over a chair.

And her figure, when once it was free and no longer confined and drawn in at the waist, became more perfect, regaining its natural lines, which were as graceful and perfectly rounded as those of a marble statue, — a statue all alive, and constantly changing with her movements, but whose every attitude was charming.

The little lamp, burning alone at that late hour, lit up almost mysteriously her neck and shoulders, whose loveliness no one had ever yet beheld, and which would doubtless fade away unseen, since Yann would have none of her.

Gaud knew her face was pretty; but she had no idea of the beauty of her figure. But then, in this part of Brittany, among the daughters of

these Iceland fishermen, this beauty is almost a mark of race.

It is hardly noticed, and even the worst of them have a modesty about letting it be seen, instead of making a show of it. No; it is the modern civilization of cities which attaches importance to such things as subjects for the sculptor or the painter.

Gaud began to undo the little coils of hair which were rolled up over her ears, and the braids fell over her shoulders like two heavy serpents.

She did them up in a crown on the top of her head, to be more comfortable while she slept, and then with her straight profile she looked like a Roman virgin.

Still she stood with her arms uplifted, her fingers busy with her blond tresses, and still biting her lips like a child playing with a toy while he thinks of something else; then, letting the long braids fall again, she began quickly to undo them, unbraiding them and spreading them out to amuse herself until they covered her to her knees, and then she looked like some fair Druidess of the forest. And at last as she began to get sleepy in spite of all her love and longing to cry, she suddenly threw herself into her bed, hiding her head in the soft masses of her hair, which covered her like a veil.

In her cottage at Ploubazlanec Grandmother Moan — she who was going down the darker.

downhill side of life — had also finally fallen asleep, that cheerless sleep of the aged, while thinking of her grandson and of death.

At the same hour, on board the "Marie," in the northern sea, which was very rough that evening, Yann and Sylvestre — those two so missed at home — were fishing away gayly and singing songs by the continual light of the endless day.

CHAPTER VI.

ABOUT a month later, in June.

Off Iceland it was that rare kind of weather which sailors call "a white calm." The air was perfectly motionless, as if all the tired breezes had vanished away.

The heavens were covered with a great whitish veil, darkening a little at its lower edge near the horizon into a kind of leaden gray, — the color of dull tin. And underneath, the motionless waters glittered with a pale light, which fatigued the eyes and made one shiver; the sea looked like watered silk, with constantly changing ripples playing over its smooth surface, little delicate flaws like a breath on a mirror, and the whole glittering expanse of waters seemed covered with a network of indefinite designs, interlacing and effacing each other, quickly coming and quickly gone.

It was impossible to say whether it was eternal

evening or eternal dawn. A sun which no longer told the hour rested ever over the horizon as if presiding over the glittering, lifeless world ; it seemed itself hardly more than a formless disk, immeasurably enlarged by the wavering halo which surrounded it.

Yann and Sylvestre, as they fished on beside each other, were singing "Jean François de Nantes," — a song without an end, — enjoying its very monotony, looking at each other out of the corners of their eyes, and laughing at the childish fun they were getting out of repeating forever these same couplets, and trying to sing them with a different expression each time. Their cheeks were ruddy with the salt freshness of the air they were breathing, which was pure and vivifying ; and they filled their lungs full of it, as though from the fountain-head of life and vigor.

And yet all around them there was not a sign of life, but the semblance of a world that was dead, or of one not yet created ; the light was without warmth, and everything seemed immovable, as if frozen stiff forever under the gaze of that great spectral eye, — the sun.

The "Marie" cast a long reflection over the surface of the sea, like an evening shadow which looked green on the white and polished mirror in which was reflected the glaring light of the sky. And in all that part which was covered by the shadow could be seen everything that was going on underneath, on account of the clearness of the

water. Innumerable fishes, thousands on thousands all alike, were gliding quietly along in the same direction, as if they all had the same purpose in their never-ending journey. These were the cod, which were performing their evolutions together, stretching along in the same direction in strictly parallel lines, — like gray clefts in the water, — and trembling constantly with a rapid movement which gave a look of fluidity to the mass of silent life. Sometimes, with a quick flip of their tails, they would all turn over at once, showing the glittering silver scales underneath; and with the same flip of the tail, they would all turn back again, communicating this motion through the entire school with slow undulations, as if thousands of metallic blades had flashed for a moment in the sunlight between two waves.

The sun, already low in the sky, sank still lower; surely it must be evening. The lower it descended into the leaden banks of cloud which hung over the sea, the more yellow it became, and its shape grew more clear and defined, while one could bear to look at it, like the moon. It still shone; but you would have said that it was not so very far away, and that if you went in a boat only to the edge of the horizon, you would run up against this great melancholy balloon floating about in the air, two or three yards above the waters.

The fishing went on fast enough; looking into the still water you could see very clearly how it was done: the cod swam up and took the bait

with a hungry snap, and then shook themselves a little, feeling the prick of the hook, only fastening it in more firmly, and then every few minutes the fishermen pulled in their lines, hand over hand, throwing over the fish to the man who split and flattened them.

The little fleet of Paimpol fishing-boats was scattered over this tranquil mirror, enlivening the deserted waters. Here and there their small sails appeared in the distance, set as a matter of form, — for there was not a breath stirring, — and standing out white and clear against the gray line of the horizon. To-day it seemed a very quiet and easy business, — this Iceland fishing, only fit for girls.

“Jean François de Nantes !
Jean François !
Jean François !”

they sang, — the two big children.

Yann was not in the least conscious on account of his fine figure and his good looks ; but he was never a child except with Sylvestre, and sang and joked with him alone. He was very reserved with others, and rather inclined to be serious and haughty, — very pleasant always, however, when anything was wanted of him, and always good and obliging as long as they did not annoy him.

While they were singing this song, the two others, a few yards away, were singing something else, — some other medley of drowsiness, good health, and vague melancholy.

They were busy and content, and the hours went quickly by.

Down below in the cabin a little fire smouldered away at the bottom of the iron stove, and the hatchway was closed to make it seem like night for those who wanted to sleep. They needed very little air while they slept; men much less robust and brought up in cities would have required more. But when the lungs are expanded all day long with the air of this same limitless space, they too rest, as it were, and scarcely need to respire at all; so one can coil one's self up in no matter how small a place, like an animal.

The crew went to bed after their watch at odd times, just as the fancy took them, and their slumber was always healthy, quiet, and dreamless, and one in which they found complete repose.

“Jean François de Nantes!

Jean François!

Jean François!”

Just now they were looking at something barely distinguishable at the edge of the gray horizon, — a light smoke rising from the waters, like a microscopic spiral of another tone of gray, a little darker than that of the sky. They had noticed it immediately, with eyes long accustomed to look into the distance.

“A steamer off there!”

“I think,” said the captain, looking more carefully, “that she is a government ship, a cruiser on her way home.”

This light smoke was bringing news from France, and letters, among which was one from a certain old grandmother, written by the hand of a beautiful young girl.

The steamer came up slowly ; but soon they could distinguish her black hull. It was in fact a cruiser which had just completed a trip among the western fiords.

At the same time a slight breeze sprung up, sharp and keen, and began to roughen in places the surface of the lifeless water. It drew upon the shining mirror figures in greenish blue, which lengthened out into rays, or spread out into fans, or multiplied into branches like seaweed.

It came up very rapidly, with a rustling sound like a signal of awakening, as if foretelling the end of the great calm. And the sky, freed from its veil, cleared off ; and the clouds gathering over the horizon were piled up in fleecy gray banks, forming, as it were, a misty rampart around the sea.

The two interminable ice floes, one above and one below, between which the fishing fleet was lying, regained their deep transparency, as if the cloudy mistiness which had dimmed them had been wiped away. The weather changed, indeed, but in a rapid way which boded no good.

From all points of the compass gathered the French fishing-boats which were cruising in those altitudes, — from Brittany, Normandy, Boulogne, or Dunkirk.

Like birds who come at a call, they flocked after the cruiser; they seemed to emerge from the empty line of the horizon, and appearing in every direction with their little grayish white sails, made the great pale desert of waters seem quite alive.

No longer slowly drifting along, they had set their sails to the new fresh breeze, and came up at full speed.

The coast of Iceland itself, although quite far away, loomed up, as if it too wished to come and join the company. It stood out more and more clearly, with its great mountains of naked rock, of which it allows only one side at a time to be seen, and even that with apparent reluctance. It seemed to lengthen out into another Iceland of a like color with itself, which little by little grew clearer and clearer; but it was only a visionary island, whose most gigantic mountains were nothing but condensed masses of cloud. And the sun, ever dragging low along the horizon, unable to mount on high, showed through this phantom island in such a way that it gave the strange illusion of being placed in front of it. Its halo was gone, and its round disk, again very sharply defined, seemed almost like some poor yellow planet, half dead and faltering, which had stopped there in the midst of chaos.

The cruiser, which had now brought to, was quite surrounded by the fleet of Iceland fishing-

vessels. Little boats detached themselves from all these ships, looking like walnut-shells on the ocean; taking on board rough men with long beards, in garments which looked uncouth enough. They all of them had something to ask for, almost like children,—remedies for their bruises, articles to use in repairs, provisions, and letters.

And some of the men were sent by their captains to be put in irons to expiate some disobedience or mutiny, and as they had all been in government service, it seemed quite natural to them.

And when the quarter-deck was encumbered by four or five of these great fellows stretched out with the irons on their ankles, the old mate who had bound them would say, "Lie over there, boys, so we can pass;" which they did obediently, with a smile.

There were a great many letters that time for the Icelanders. Among others, two for the "Marie," Captain Guermeur; one for Monsieur Gaos, Yann; the second for Monsieur Moan, Sylvestre (this had come by Denmark to Reikjavik, where the cruiser had taken it off).

The purser distributed them from his canvas bag, having trouble oftentimes in reading them, as they were not all written by practised hands.

And the commander kept saying, "Come, hurry up there; the barometer's falling."

He disliked to see all those little walnut-shells

afloat on the sea, and so many fishermen together in that dangerous region.

✓ Yann and Sylvestre always read their letters together. This time it was by the light of a midnight sun, which shone upon them from over the horizon, still with the same look of a dead star.

Seated side by side at one corner of the bridge, with their arms around each other's shoulders, they read very slowly, as if to take in more completely the home news which their letters gave them.

In Yann's letter Sylvestre found news of Marie Gaos, his little sweetheart; in Sylvestre's were the funny stories of old Grandmother Moan, who had not an equal for writing amusing letters to those away from home; and then there was that last line about Yann, —

“My regards to young Gaos.”

When they had finished reading their letters, Sylvestre timidly showed his to his big friend, to make him notice whose hand had written it. “See, that's pretty writing, is n't it, Yann?”

But Yann, who knew very well what young girl's writing it was, turned away his head and shrugged his shoulders, as if he had had enough of this Gaud.

Then Sylvestre carefully folded up the poor despised little letter, put it back in its envelope, and stuck it away under his jersey near his heart, saying sadly to himself, —

“They never in the world will be married; but what can he have against her?”

Midnight rang out by the bell of the cruiser, and still they remained sitting there, lost in a dreamy revery, thinking of home, and of those far away.

At this moment the eternal sun, which had dipped his edge a little in the waters, began slowly to remount the skies ; and it was morning.





PART II.

CHAPTER I.



THE Iceland sun had quite changed its look and color, and the new day was ushered in by a foreboding dawn. The sun had quite emerged from its misty halo, and shone with resplendent rays, which shot across the sky like jets of flame heralding the coming storm.

The weather for several days past had been too fine to last. The breeze whistled over this concourse of fishing-boats as if ordering them to disperse and clear the sea; then they began to scatter, to flee away like an army in retreat, and before nothing but the menace written in the sky which no one could mistake.

It blew up stronger and stronger, and ships and crews alike trembled at the coming storm.

The waves, as yet small, now began to run after one another in groups, and were roughened and seamed by long streaks of white foam which

blew off like smoke with a little seething sound. One would almost have said that the sea was cooking and burning ; and the shrill sound of it all grew louder every moment.

The sailors thought no longer of fishing, but only of the safety of their ships. Their lines had long since been pulled in, and all were hastening away, some to seek shelter in the fiords, should they arrive in time ; others preferred to round the southern point of Iceland, thinking it safer to put to sea, and to have open space before them to drive before the wind. They could still catch glimpses of one another, as here and there, in the trough of the seas, their sails could be seen rising and falling, — poor little wet things tired and flying, but still holding themselves erect like children's toys of elder cork, which one blows over with a breath, but which always right themselves again.

— The heavy mass of clouds which was condensed over the western horizon into the shape of an island now began to unfold, and break up at the top, spreading out in tatters over the sky. It seemed inexhaustible ; the wind expanded it, lengthened it, and stretched it out, unwinding it forever into dark curtains and spreading it over the clear yellow sky, which had now assumed a cold and livid aspect.

And still the great breath which was disturbing everything grew stronger and stronger.

The cruiser had gone off to find shelter under the lee of Iceland ; and the fishing-boats were left

alone on the stormy sea, which had taken on a threatening and ugly look. They hastened to make all snug for bad weather, getting farther and farther apart ; they would soon be lost to sight. The waves, curling over into scrolls, continued to chase one another, closing in and becoming higher and still higher, while between them the great troughs grew ever wider.

In two or three hours, this region of the sea, which had been so calm the evening before, had become one great effort and tumult, and instead of the former stillness, there was a deafening clamor of sound. This change which was now rapidly taking place before their eyes, without reason or purpose, why was it? What a mystery of blind destruction ! The clouds had now quite unfolded themselves over the sky, coming ever from the west, piled up and pressed down and rapidly obscuring everything. Some yellow rents still remained, through which the sun shot down its rays. And the water, now greenish in color, became more and more streaked with zigzagging lines of froth. By noon the " Marie " looked quite prepared for a storm ; her hatchways closed, and her sails furled, she bounded, light and agile, over the waves in the midst of the increasing chaos, like a great porpoise for whom the tempests are a pastime. With only her mainsail set, she scudded before the gale, as the sailors' expression has it.

Overhead the sky had become quite dark, like a closed dome, lowering and black, with some

coal-black wreaths, darker still, spread over its lower surface like great smutches.

This dome of clouds seemed almost motionless, and one had to look very closely to discover that it was in full whirl of motion. Great gray sheets went hurrying past, continually replaced by others coming from below the horizon, like shadowy hangings, unwinding themselves forever as from an endless reel.

The "Marie" flew before the storm, flew faster and faster; and the storm flew too before some unknown force, mysterious and terrible. The gale, the sea, the "Marie," all were seized by this same madness of flight and speed in the same direction. Fastest of all hurried the wind, then came the great surges of the swell, heavier, slower, rushing after, then the "Marie," carried along in the universal movement. The waves pursued her with their foaming crests which rolled after her in a perpetual fall, and she, always overtaken and always outrun, still escaped them by the clever furrow which she left behind, in which their fury was exhausted. And in this flying pace what they felt the most was the sense of lightness, as if they were bounding over the waves without trouble or effort. When the "Marie" rose on the billows, it was without a shock, and her descent was like a glide, giving one that sinking feeling which one has going down a Russian slide, or in the imaginary falls of a dream. She seemed to be sliding down backward, the fleeing mountain

falling away from under her, to rush onward ; and then she plunged again into one of those great abysses which were fleeing too, but without harm, for she but touched its horrible depth in a splashing of water which hardly wet her, and which fled too like the rest, — which fled and vanished away like smoke, into nothing.

At the bottom of these abysses it was darker than ever ; and after each wave which passed they looked back to see the next rising up behind them larger yet, and quite green and transparent, which hurried after them with furious contortions and crests ready to close over them, as if to say, “Wait till I catch you, till I swallow you up.”

But no, it only lifted them as you would lift a feather in shrugging your shoulders, and almost gently they felt it pass under them with its rushing foam and its crash of falling water.

So it went on, and grew ever worse and worse. The waves followed one another, more enormous yet, in vast mountain ranges, whose valleys were frightful to see.

And all this mad movement grew faster and faster under an ever-blackening sky, in the midst of an ever-increasing uproar.

It was indeed very bad weather, and they had to be on the alert. But as long as they had sea room before them and were able to run before the wind, all might be well. And as the “Marie” that year had spent the season in the most western part of the Iceland fisheries, all this driving

toward the east was so much gained on their way home.

Yann and Sylvestre were at the helm lashed to it by the waist. They were still singing the song of "Jean François de Nantes," exhilarated by the rapid motion, and were shouting at the top of their voices, smiling at being able to hear themselves no longer, amid all this clamor which had been let loose, amusing themselves by turning their faces to sing against the wind, and losing their breath.

"Well, boys, are n't your mouths shut up there?" Guermeur asked them, poking his bearded face out of the half-opened hatchway like a jack-in-the-box. Oh, no, indeed! no wind could shut them up.

They were not afraid; they knew just what they could stand and what they could not, and they had faith in the stanchness of their boat and in their own strong arms, as well as in the protection of that china Virgin which during forty years of journeyings to Iceland had so many times danced to that evil tune, always smiling from among her bouquets of artificial flowers.

"Jean François de Nantes!
Jean François!
Jean François!"

Most of the time they could see but a very little distance about them. A few hundred yards away everything seemed to end in those frightful

billows which reared their white crests on high and shut them in.

They seemed always to be in the middle of an enclosed space, although a constantly changing one, and then besides, everything was drowned in a kind of smoky spray which blew in clouds with the rapidity of lightning over the whole surface of the sea.

But every now and then a rift of light would appear toward the northwest, and a puff of wind would rush down; and then a shivering light would strike across the sea from the horizon, and a long wavering reflection would stretch across the tossing white crests, making the sombre dome of the sky seem darker still.

This rift of light was a terrible thing to see, for the glimpse it gave into the distances, into those dim vistas of storm, increased still more their fear, and made them see only too clearly that everywhere the same tumult, everywhere the same fury prevailed, even beyond the great empty line of the horizon, — infinitely afar; the great terror had no limits, and they were alone in the midst of it.

A titanic clamor sounded around and about them like the opening blast from the trumpet of judgment, foretelling the terror of the end of the world. They made out thousands of voices; those on high, either shrill or deep, and seeming almost distant from being so big, — this was the gale, the great soul of the uproar, the invisible power which carried on the whole thing. It was frightful; but

there were other sounds, nearer, more material, and more threatening, rising from the tormented water which sizzled as if on live coals.

Still it grew and grew. And now in spite of their flying pace, the sea began to cover them, "to eat them up," as they said: first the spray whipping them from aft, then great bales of water, thrown with a force which might break everything. The waves grew higher and still madly higher, and yet more and more ravelled out; and one saw them hanging about in great green tatters, which was the falling water scattered by the wind. It fell in heavy masses on the deck, with a crash which made the "Marie" tremble all over as if in pain. Now they could distinguish nothing more on account of all this drift of white froth; when the gusts groaned their deepest, they could see it whirled along in thicker clouds, like dust on the roads in summer.

A heavy rain which had come on fell aslant, almost horizontally, and all these things hissed together, lashing and wounding like stripes. Still Yann and Sylvestre both remained there, lashed to the helm and holding on tightly, clad in their oilskins, which were stiff and shiny like sharkskins. They had tied them tight at the neck, wrists, and ankles, with bits of tarred rope, to keep out the water, which trickled all over them; and they braced their backs like buttresses when it came down the hardest, so as not to be thrown down. The skin of their cheeks was smarting, and they

lost their breath at every moment ; and after each great sea had passed over them, they looked at each other and smiled at the mass of salt which had collected on their beards.

But finally this fury which would not abate, but remained at the same pitch of rage, became fearfully fatiguing.

The anger of men and of beasts is soon exhausted and appeased ; but that of inanimate Nature — causeless, aimless, and mysterious as life or death — must long be endured.

“ Jean François de Nantes !
Jean François !
Jean François ! ”

The refrain of the old song still fell from their pale lips ; but it was a tuneless sound, repeated almost mechanically from time to time.

The excess of sound and motion had intoxicated and stupefied them ; and in spite of their youth, their smiles turned to grimaces over their teeth, which were chattering with the cold, and their eyes, half closed under their salty, burning eyelashes, were fixed in a sort of savage stare. Bound to the helm like two pillars of marble, their hands cramped and blue, they made the necessary movements of the wheel almost unconsciously, through the mere force of habit. With their dripping hair and their contracted mouths, they became strange things to look at, and the savage which lurks at the bottom of every man appeared in them.

They could see each other no longer; they simply knew they were there, one beside the other. At moments of the most frightful danger, each time there rose up behind them a new mountain of water, towering, roaring, and horrible, which rushed against the ship with a great dull crash, one of their hands would move involuntarily, making the sign of the cross.

They thought no longer of anything, — neither of Gaud, nor of any other woman, nor of any marriage. It had lasted too long for them to be capable of thought; their intoxication of noise, fatigue, and cold had dulled their brains. They were but two pillars of flesh clutching the helm, two strong animals clinging there through the instinct of self-preservation.

CHAPTER II.

✓ It was in Brittany; a cool day in the latter part of September.

Gaud was walking along all alone over the country of Ploubazlanec toward Pors-Even.

The Iceland boats had been back for more than a month, — except two which had disappeared in the June storm. But the “Marie” had held her own, and Yann and all the crew were safely on shore.

Gaud felt very much excited at going to visit

Yann's home. She had seen him only once since he came back from Iceland. It was when they had all gone together to see poor little Sylvestre off to "service." They went with him as far as to the diligence, when he, crying a little, and his poor old grandmother a great deal, had finally departed to report at headquarters at Brest. Yann had come too to bid his little friend good-by; but he pretended not to see Gaud when she looked at him, and as there was a crowd around the diligence, — others drafted for the service who were going away, and their relatives assembled to bid them good-by, — there was no opportunity to speak to him.

Then finally Gaud had made a great resolve, and although somewhat afraid, had gone herself to the Gaos' house. Her father had had at one time some business with Yann's (that complicated sort of business which among fishermen as well as peasants is never finished), and owed him a hundred francs' commission for the sale of a ship which had just been accomplished. "You might let me take the money, Father," she said. "I should like to see Marie Gaos, in the first place, and then I have never been so far in Ploubazlanec, and it would amuse me to take such a nice long walk."

She was in fact deeply curious to see this family of Yann, the house, and the village where she perhaps might go herself one day.

In one of her last conversations with Sylvestre

before he went away, he had explained in a manner his friend's rudeness. "You see, Gaud, it's because he is like this, — he has an idea that he does n't want to marry any one. He only loves the sea, and one day, for a joke, he even said that he had promised to marry her."

She had forgiven Yann his queer ways; and seeing always in her memory that pleasant smile he wore at the ball, she had begun to hope again. If she should meet him there in his own home, she would not say anything herself to him, of course. She had no idea of being so bold as that; but when he saw her near to him again perhaps he might say something.

CHAPTER III.

GAUD walked briskly along for an hour, excited and nervous, and breathing in the health-giving breeze from the sea. Here and there, great crosses were planted at the cross-roads. Every now and then she passed little hamlets of seamen's huts, which are beaten all the year round by the wind, and whose color is like that of the rocks.

In one, where the road narrowed off suddenly between dark walls, with high roofs of thatch pointed like Celtic huts, she saw a tavern sign which made her smile, — "At the Chinese Cider."

Two apes in pink and blue gowns, and with

pig-tails, were painted drinking cider. A fancy of some old salt who had come back from that distant land, no doubt. She looked about at everything as she went by. When people are very much concerned about the object of their journey, they are more than ever interested in all the thousand details of their route.

Gaud had now left the little village far behind ; and the farther she advanced along this last head-land of Brittany, the fewer the trees became, and the more melancholy the country. †

The ground was rocky and uneven, and from all the little elevations she could see the ocean. There were no trees at all now, only the bare heath with its green furze, and here and there the divine crucified stretching out the great arms of their crosses against the sky, giving the whole region the look of a great place of justice.

At one crossing, which was guarded by one of these great crucifixes, she stopped hesitating before two roads, which disappeared among the thorny hills, when a little girl ran up just in time to relieve her from her embarrassment.

“Good-day, Mademoiselle Gaud.” She was a little Gaos, a small sister of Yann. When Gaud had kissed her, she asked her if her father and mother were at home.

“Papa and Mamma, yes, they are at home, only my brother Yann is away,” said the little one, quite innocently ; “he has gone to Loguivy, but I think he will be back before long.”

He was not there ! What evil fate was it which always and everywhere kept them apart? She was much inclined to put off her visit till another time. But here was this little girl who had met her on the way and might speak about it. What would they think of that at Pors-Even? So she decided to go on, thinking how long she could possibly stay before she would have to return.

The nearer she approached this village of Yann, in this desolate spot, the more rough and deserted everything appeared. The great sea-breeze which strengthens men makes the vegetation lower, more scanty and stunted, and flattens it down into the hard earth. In the path there were a few seaweeds trailing on the ground, another foliage than ours, showing that another world was near, and spreading their salt odor in the air. ✕

Gaud met some few passers-by, — seafaring folk, who could be seen from afar in this naked country, standing out as if magnified against the distant high line of the sea. Pilots they were, or fishermen, who had the appearance always of gazing at something in the distance, of watching over the sea, as they passed her and bade her good-day.

Their faces were bronzed, and looked very strong and manly under their sailor's caps. The time would not go by, and really she did not know what to do to prolong her journey. Peo-

ple looked astonished to see her walking so slowly. What was Yann doing at Loguivy ? Making love to the girls, perhaps — Ah, if she had only known how little he really cared about girls of the frivolous kind !

The “fillettes de Paimpol,” as the old Iceland song has it, are much too free and easy, and would never be severe to a handsome fellow like him ; but they had but little interest for him. He did not consider them worth even the little trouble it cost to make their conquest. No, he had merely gone to give an order to a certain basket-maker of that village who was the only one in the country who knew just the right way to make lobster-pots. His head was quite free from any thought of love at that moment.

Gaud arrived at a chapel, which she had seen from a distance on a hill. It was a gray little chapel, very small and very old. In the midst of the sterility around, there grew along in the shadow of the wall a little clump of trees, gray too and already leafless, which looked like its hair thrown all to one side as if by some mighty invisible hand. And this hand was the same which sinks the fishermen's boats in the sea, — the eternal hand of the west wind, which hides unseen in the rush of the waves and the swell, and the twisted branches on the shore. They had grown gnarled and twisted, these old trees, and their backs were bent under the incessant pressure of this mighty hand.

Gaud found herself nearly at the end of her journey, since this was the chapel of Pors-Even, and she stopped here to gain a little more time.

A low wall half sunken in the ground marked out an enclosure which contained a number of crosses. Everything was of one color, — the chapel, the trees, and the tombstones; the whole place seemed stained and crumbling away under the action of the sea and the wind. The same grayish lichens, with spots of sulphurous yellow, covered the tombstones, the knotty branches, and the statues of saints in granite which stood in the niches of the wall.

On one of the wooden crosses a name was painted in large letters: GAOS, — GAOS, JOËL, *aged eighty years.*

Ah, yes, to be sure, the grandfather; she knew that. The sea would have none of that old mariner. And then of course a number of Yann's relatives would naturally be buried here, and she should have expected it; nevertheless, that name read thus on this tombstone made a painful impression upon her.

In order to pass away a few moments more, she went in under the ancient little porch (which was worn with age and roughly plastered and whitewashed) to say a prayer. But there she stopped again with a still greater sinking of the heart.

"Gaos," — again that name, engraved on one of those tablets which are put up in memory of

those who have been lost at sea. She began to read the inscription.

To the memory of
GAOS, JEAN LOUIS,
aged 24 years, sailor on board the "Marguerite,"
which was lost near Iceland, 3 Aug., 1877.
May he rest in peace!

Iceland, — always Iceland ! everywhere around in the entrance to the chapel were fastened other wooden tablets, bearing the names of dead sailors. It was the corner of the Pors-Even sailors who had been lost at sea, and she was sorry she had come there, and felt oppressed with a gloomy presentiment. She had seen many such inscriptions in the church at Paimpol, but here in this village, the empty tomb of the fishermen seemed smaller, and somehow, more lonely, more desolate and decayed. On each side of the porch was a granite bench for widows and mothers ; and the low irregular grotto-like place was guarded by a very good-natured old Virgin, freshly painted in red, with great wicked eyes, who looked like Cybele, the first goddess of the earth.

Gaos, again !

In memory of
GAOS, FRANÇOIS,
husband of Anne-Marie-Le Goaster,
Captain of the "Pampolais,"
which was lost near Iceland between
the 1st-3d April, 1877,
with her whole crew of twenty-three men.
May they rest in peace !

And below were two more crossbones, under a black skull with green eyes, — a rude mortuary design, expressing the barbarity of a former age. Gaos ! everywhere that name ! Another Gaos, called Ives, *swept off his ship and lost near the northern fiord, aged 22 years*. This tablet seemed to have been there for many a year ; he was probably quite forgotten by this time.

As she read it, an excess of almost despairing tenderness for Yann filled her heart. Never, no never, would he belong to her. Why dispute for him with the sea, which had devoured so many others of his name, ancestors and brothers who were probably just like him ?

Gaud went into the chapel, where it was already nearly dark, dimly lighted as it was by the low windows in the thick walls.

And then her heart filled with unshed tears ; she knelt to pray before the saints and virgins, enormous in size and wreathed in rude flowers, whose heads nearly touched the vaulted roof. Outside, the wind, which was rising, began to sob and sigh as if bringing back to the land of Brittany the wail of these lost fishermen. The evening was coming on ; she would have to make up her mind to pay her visit and execute her commission. She started on her way again, and after having inquired in the village, she found the Gaos' house, which was built up against a high cliff, a flight of a dozen granite steps leading up to it. Trembling slightly at the idea that Yann might

have returned, she crossed the little garden where chrysanthemums and speedwells were growing; as she went in she said that she had brought the money for the sale of the ship, and they offered her a seat very politely, asking her to wait until the return of their father, who would then make out a receipt for it. She looked for Yann among all those who were there, but did not see him.

They were very busy indoors; on a large white table lay cut out in new cotton those coats called "oilskins," which they were getting ready for the coming season in Iceland.

"You see, Mademoiselle Gaud, each man must have two complete changes when he's out there." Then they explained to her how they painted and oiled them afterward, — these bad-weather clothes.

While they were giving her all the little details, her eyes wandered curiously about the room. It was arranged in the traditional fashion of the Breton cottages; an enormous chimney occupied one end, and beds in wooden presses were built along the sides. But it was not dark or gloomy like the huts of laborers, which are always half sunken in the ground by the wayside. It was light and cheerful, as the cottages of seafaring men usually are. Several little Gaoses were there, — boys and girls, all Yann's brothers and sisters, without counting two grown-up ones who were away at sea; and then one very little blond girl, sad-looking and neat, who did not look like the others.

“One we adopted last year,” the mother explained. “We already had enough, to be sure; but what could we do, Mademoiselle Gaud? Her father was on the ‘Marie-Dieu-t’aime,’ which was lost off Iceland last season, as you know; then we neighbors divided the five children who were left among us, and she is the one who fell to our share.”

Hearing that they were talking about her, the little adopted child hung her head and smilingly hid herself behind little Laumec Gaos, who was her favorite.

There was an air of comfort about the whole house, and the fresh look of perfect health in the rosy cheeks of the children.

They treated Gaud with great distinction, as was becoming a pretty young lady whose visit was an honor to the family.

They took her up by a stairway of white wood, which was quite new, into that upper room which was the glory of the house. She remembered well the history of the building of this upper story; it all came from the salvage of an abandoned wreck which Father Gaos and his cousin the pilot had found in the Channel. Yann had told her all about it the night of the ball. This room which the wreck had paid for was very pretty and cheerful in its coat of fresh white paint. There were two beds in it arranged in city fashion, with curtains of pink chintz and a large table in the middle of the room. From the window there

was a view over the whole of Paimpol, and all the roadstead, with the Iceland fishing-boats drawn up at anchor, and the Channel, through which they put out to sea.

She did not dare to ask, but she would have so much liked to know where Yann slept ; probably when he was a child he must have occupied one of those old beds in the presses downstairs. But now perhaps it was here under these pretty pink curtains. She would have so liked to know all about each little detail of his life, and what he did during the long winter evenings.

A rather heavy step on the stairway made her tremble. No, it was not Yann, but a man who was very much like him in spite of his white hair, and almost as tall and as straight as he, — Father Gaos coming home from fishing.

After he had greeted her, and found out the object of her visit, he made out the receipt, which was a somewhat lengthy operation ; for his hand, he said, was no longer very steady. However, he did not accept the hundred francs as a definite payment, as a full discharge of his dues for the sale of the ship. No, it was only on account ; he would talk with M. Mével again about it. At this, Gaud, who cared little about money, smiled a scarcely perceptible smile. "So much the better," she thought ; "this is not the end of it, then." She never supposed it would be ; and it was sure to make more business with the Gaos household, which would have to be arranged.

They almost made excuses for Yann's absence, as if it would have been more polite if all the family had been there to receive her. The father had perhaps suspected, with the sagacity of an old mariner, that his son was not entirely indifferent to the pretty heiress, for he brought the conversation back to him quite pointedly.

"It's very strange," he said; "he hardly ever stays out so late. He has gone to Loguivy, Mademoiselle Gaud, to buy lobster-pots. You know lobsters are what we catch mostly in winter-time."

And she, absent and distracted, prolonged her visit, although she felt she was staying too long; while her heart sank more and more at the thought that she really was not going to see him.

"A good boy like him! What on earth can he be doing? He is not at a tavern, that's sure. We have never had that to fear with our son. We don't say but that once in a while, on a Sunday with his friends — but then you know what sailors are, Mademoiselle Gaud; and then, dear me, when one is young, there is no use depriving one's self of everything. But it is a very rare thing with him; he is a right good fellow, we can assure you."

But still the night was coming on. They had folded up the oilskins and stopped work. The little Gaos and the little adopted child were sitting close together on the benches, somewhat subdued by the gray twilight hour, and looking wonderingly at Gaud, as much as to say, "And now why does n't she go home?" And in the

chimney the fire began to burn up red in the twilight. "You must stay and take supper with us, Mademoiselle Gaud." Oh, no, she could not. The blood mounted into her cheeks at the thought that she had stayed so long, and she rose and took her leave.

Father Gaos rose also to accompany her part of the way home, as far as a certain lonely hollow, where the old trees made the path very dark.

While they were walking so, side by side, Gaud felt a great respect and tenderness for him rise in her heart, and an impulse came to her to speak to him of her trouble as she would to a father; but the words stuck in her throat, and she could say nothing.

They were walking along in the cool evening breeze, which smelt of the sea, passing here and there, scattered over the land, little cottages already shut up for the night, looking very gloomy under their low roofs, these poor nests to shelter fishermen; and they also passed crosses placed here and there among the furze and the rocks. How far away Pors-Even was, and how late it had grown!

Once in a while they passed people coming back from Paimpol or Loguivy. As Gaud saw these human silhouettes approaching, she thought each time that it was Yann; but it was easy to recognize him, and she was quickly undeceived. Her feet tripped in the trailing brown plants growing along the ground, which was the seaweed

matted like hair. At the cross of Plouëzoc'h she bade the old man good-by, and begged him to return.

She could already see the lights of Paimpol, and there was no longer any need to be afraid. So it was all over for this time ; and now who knew when she should see Yann again ?

She could find plenty of excuses to go to Pors-Even ; but that would hardly do. It certainly would not look well for her to go there again. She could never be as bold as that. If only her little confidant Sylvestre were still here, she might have sent him to find Yann, and to get him to explain himself. But he was gone, and no one knew for how long.

CHAPTER IV.

“GET married?” said Yann to his parents that evening. “Dear me ! what for ? Am I not happy enough here with you all ? No bother, no quarrels, with anybody, and good hot soup every evening when I get home from fishing. Oh, yes ! I know all about who has been here in the house to-day. In the first place, I don’t see why so rich a girl can want to have anything to do with poor people like us. And then I have made up my mind not to marry her or anybody else ; it’s not my idea.”

The two old people looked at each other in silence, deeply disappointed ; for they had talked it over together, and had decided that this young girl would not refuse their handsome Yann. But they did not attempt to urge it, knowing that it would be quite useless. His mother especially hung her head and said nothing at all. She always regarded the wishes of her eldest son, who had almost the position of head of the family. Although he was always very gentle and kind to her, and more submissive than a child in the small affairs of life, he had long been his own master in large matters, and replied to all efforts at compulsion with a quietly indomitable independence.

He never stayed up late, having the habit of all fishermen of rising before daybreak. So after supper, about eight o'clock, having cast a last look of satisfaction at his lobster-pots and his new fishing-nets, he began to undress with a mind apparently entirely at ease. Then he went up to bed under the pink curtains, in the room which he shared with his little brother Laumec.

CHAPTER V.

FOR the last fortnight Gaud's little confidant Sylvestre had been at headquarters in Brest,—very homesick, but very good. Putting on great airs with his wide blue collar and his red tufted cap,

he was a splendid-looking sailor, with his rolling gait and his tall figure ; but in his heart he was mourning for his good old grandmother, and was the same innocent child as of yore. Once only he went on a spree, and that was with his own town's people, because it was the custom ; and they all came rolling home together arm in arm to the barracks, singing at the top of their voices.

One Sunday, too, he went to the theatre, in the top gallery. They were playing one of those great nautical dramas where the sailors, enraged with the traitor, greet him with a *hou*, which they all give together, and which makes a deep sound like the west wind. He found it very warm, as there was little air in the place, and when he tried to take off his jacket he was reprimanded by an officer of the theatre, and toward the end he fell asleep.

As he went back to his barracks after midnight, he met several women of sufficiently mature age, with their hair very fashionably dressed, who were strolling up and down the sidewalks.

"See here, pretty boy," they said with their deep, harsh voices.

He understood at once what it was they wanted, not being quite as green as one might have thought.

But the quick remembrance of his old grandmother and Marie Gaos made him pass them by very contemptuously, looking down on them from

the height of his youth and good looks with a glance of childish scorn.

They were very much astonished, these charming fair ones, to find this sailor so reserved.

“Did you ever see anybody like him? Look out for yourself, my boy. Run away quickly; we are going to eat you up.”

And the sound of the shameful things they called after him was lost in the indefinite rumble which filled the streets on this Sunday night; and he remained just the same at Brest as he had been in Iceland on the open sea, — quite innocent and pure. But his comrades made no fun of him, because of his strength, — a quality which always inspires respect among sailors.

CHAPTER VI.

ONE day Sylvestre was called to the office of his company, and informed that he had been assigned to service in China with the squadron off Formosa. He had felt for some time that it would turn out so, and he had heard people who read the papers say that the war would never finish out there. As they were to go almost immediately, they informed him at the same time that the leave of absence for good-byes which is usually given to those about to start for the seat of war, would

in this case not be granted. In five days he would have to pack up and be off.

He was much excited and disturbed at the news. The charm of the long journey, the prospect of seeing new countries, and the thought of war, mingled with the pain of leaving everything dear, and the vague presentiment that he should never return, almost confused him.

A thousand thoughts whirled in his brain. There was a great noise around him in the hall of the building which was used as headquarters, where a number of others had also just been told of their assignment to this Chinese squadron.

And then he immediately set about writing to his poor old grandmother as quickly as he could, with a pencil, sitting on the ground lost in troubled thought in the midst of the coming and going and the noise of the young men who like himself were also going away.

CHAPTER VII.

“SHE is a little ancient, that sweetheart of his,” said Sylvestre’s comrades, two days after, laughingly, behind his back; “but all the same they seem to understand each other very well.”

It amused them to see him walking the streets of Recouvrance for the first time like other people, with a woman on his arm, leaning over her

and saying things which were doubtless very sweet and tender.

She was a little person, with a rather trim figure, — seen from behind ; skirts a trifle short perhaps for the prevailing fashion, a little brown shawl, and a great Paimpol cap.

She hung on his arm, and looked tenderly into his face.

“ She is certainly a bit old, his sweetheart ! ”

They did not mean anything very unkind when they said it, for they could see perfectly that she was a good old grandmother from the country.

She had arrived in haste, being seized with fresh terror at the news of her grandson's departure for this war in China, which had already cost the country of Paimpol so dear.

Having gotten together all her little savings, and packed her best Sunday dress and a change of caps in a bandbox, she had come to Brest to embrace him at least once more.

She went straight to his barracks to find him, but the adjutant refused to let him come out, saying, —

“ If you want to see him, my good woman, you must ask the captain ; there he is just going by.”

And ask the captain she did, and happily he let himself be persuaded.

“ Send Moan to change his clothes,” he said.

And Moan flew upstairs four steps at a time to put on his dress uniform ; while the good old woman, seeing the fun of it all as usual, made an

indescribable little face at the adjutant behind his back and dropped him a courtesy.

Then when her grandson appeared in his new uniform, with its low sailor's collar, she was amazed to find him so handsome. His black beard had been trimmed by a barber into a point, as was the fashion that year among sailors; the ruffles of his open shirt were finely plaited; and his sailor's hat had long floating ribbons with gilt anchors on the end.

For a moment she thought she saw her son Pierre, who twenty years before had also been a sailor in the fleet; and the remembrance of that time so long ago, and of all those who were dead and gone, cast its shadow over the present hour. But it was a sadness which soon disappeared. They walked out arm in arm, in the happiness of being together; and it was then that they playfully thought of her as his sweetheart, and called her a "little old."

She took him off to dinner for a treat at an inn much frequented by the people of Paimpol, and which had been recommended to them as not too dear. And afterward, they walked about Brest, still arm in arm, looking into the shop windows. But nothing was as amusing as the funny things she said herself to make her grandson laugh, in the Breton dialect of Paimpol, which the passers-by could not understand.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHE stayed three days with him, — three happy days, in spite of the thought of that gloomy time to come ; and they seemed almost like three days of grace.

Then finally the time came for her to go, to return to Paimpol. In the first place, because she had come to the end of her poor little stock of money ; and then Sylvestre was to sail on the next day but one, and sailors are inexorably shut up in their quarters on the eve of important expeditions, — a usage which seems at first sight a little harsh, but which is really a necessary precaution against sprees, on which sailors are tempted to go before starting off on a campaign.

Oh, that last day ! No matter how hard she tried, no matter how she racked her brains for something new and funny to say to her grandson, she could find nothing ; no, only tears which would try to come, and sobs which rose choking in her throat.

Hanging on his arm, she charged him with a thousand things which made him want to cry too ; and they finally went into a church to say their prayers together.

It was the evening train by which she was to return ; for economy's sake they walked to the

station, he carrying her bandbox and supporting her with his strong arm, on which she leaned with her whole weight. She was tired, so tired, the poor old woman! she was at the end of her strength, which she had so much overtaxed during the last three or four days. Her back was quite bent under her little brown shawl, as if she no longer had the strength to stand up straight. Her youthful step and carriage had quite gone, and she felt the full weight of her sixty years. At the idea that it was all over, and that in a few minutes she would have to leave him, the pain in her heart was almost too terrible to bear. And it was to China too that he was going, — off there to that massacre. She still had him there with her; she still held him with her two poor old hands; but nevertheless he was going, — not all her will, nor all her tears, nor all her despair could keep him.

Embarrassed with her ticket, her basket of provisions, and her mittens, all agitated and trembling, she gave him her last charges, to which he replied with a little submissive “yes,” bending his head tenderly over her, and looking at her with his sweet, honest eyes, like a little child.

“Come, old lady, you must make up your mind whether you are going or not.”

The engine whistled. Seized with fright lest she should miss the train, she took her box out of his hands, let it fall on the ground, and finally hung it round her neck in helpless confusion.

People stared at them a great deal in the station; but nobody felt like laughing. Pushed about by the railroad officials, exhausted and frightened to death, she threw herself at last into the first compartment she came to, which they shut on her heels; while he, with his light sailor's step, took a little turn like a bird which flies away, to get round to the crossing outside in time to see her go by.

A loud whistle, a great noise of the wheels, and his grandmother went by. Leaning up against the gate, he waved his hat with its long floating ribbons, with youthful grace; while she, leaning out of the window of her third-class carriage, waved her handkerchief, the better to be recognized. As long as she was able, as long as she could make out that dark-blue figure which was still her grandson, she followed him with her eyes, sending out her whole soul to him in that always uncertain "*Au revoir!*" which one says to departing sailors.

Look well at your little Sylvestre, poor old woman! Follow well to the last minute that diminishing figure which vanishes there forever from your sight! When she could really see him no longer, she fell back in her seat, without a thought of crushing her beautiful cap, sobbing and weeping in an agony of tears. And he went slowly back, head bent down, and the great tears rolling down his cheeks.

The autumn night had come on; the gas was

lit all along the streets ; and the sailors' holiday had begun. Without noticing anything about him, he traversed Brest, then crossed the bridge of Recouvrance, and so back to his barracks.

"Look here, pretty boy !" the harsh voices of the women were already calling, as they began their promenade up and down the pavement.

He went in and threw himself on his bed and wept there alone, hardly sleeping at all until morning.

CHAPTER IX.

SYLVESTRE was out in the open sea, being rapidly borne along over unknown waters far bluer than those of Iceland.

The ship, which was carrying him to the farthest extreme of Asia, had orders to make quick time and to cut short her stops.

He had already a sense of being very far away, on account of this hurrying speed, incessant and unvarying, which went on just the same almost without regard for wind or weather. Being a topman, he lived aloft, perched up like a bird, out of the way of the crowd of soldiers gathered together on the deck beneath.

They stopped twice off the coast of Tunis to take on more zouaves and some mules ; and Sylvestre could see in the distance white cities lying

on the sandy plains or up among the mountains. And he even came down from his perch to have a look at those dark-skinned men, draped in white garments, who came on board to sell fruit, who the others told him were Bedouins.

The sun continued to pour down with undiminished heat in spite of the autumn season, and this too gave him the impression of being very, very far away from home.

One day they arrived at a town called Port-Saïd, where all the flags of Europe were floating at the top of lofty spars and rigging, making it look like Babel on a holiday; and the shining sands surrounded it like a sea. They had dropped anchor at the quay, which was situated almost in the middle of the town, among long streets of wooden houses. Not since his departure had the outside world seemed so close to him, and he was much amused by all the bustle and the vast number of vessels.

With a continual shrieking of whistles and fog-horns, the ships all sailed off down a kind of canal, no larger than a moat, which disappeared like a silver line in the infinite distance of the desert. From the height of the maintop he could see them following one another along in a procession, being gradually lost to sight in the distant plains.

Moving about the quays were men in all kinds of costumes and of every possible color, shouting and hurrying about in the rattle and roar of all

that was going on, and in the evening, to the diabolical noise of the steam whistle was added the confused sound of several bands, playing noisy tunes, as if to drown the poignant regrets of all the many exiled from home who were passing by.

The day after, at sunrise they too sailed into this narrow ribbon of water among the sands, followed by a train of ships of every country. This promenade in single file through the desert lasted two days; then another ocean opened up before them, and they took to the open sea again. They went at full speed always; and this still warmer ocean was scattered over with dissolving red designs, and sometimes the foam in the wake of the ship was the color of blood. Sylvestre lived aloft almost all the time, and sang "Jean François de Nantes" quite low to himself, to remind him of his brother Yann, of Iceland, and of the good old times.

Sometimes in the depth of the distances, which were full of mirages, he would see a mountain of an extraordinary color looming up. Those who were in command of the ship doubtless recognized in spite of distance and indistinctness these headlands which the continents push out, like eternal guide-posts on the great thoroughfares of the world; but a sailor journeys along, carried about like a piece of luggage, knowing nothing, paying little attention to distances and measures of space which have no end for him.

As for Sylvestre, he was only conscious that he

was getting terribly far away ; and he knew that well enough from looking down at the wake of the ship, which was rushing rapidly along, and counting how long that speed which slackened neither by night nor by day had continued. The crowd of men huddled below on deck under the shadow of their tents were painfully oppressed for breath. The water, the air, the light, had all taken on a terrible overpowering splendor ; and this continual glorification of inanimate things was a mockery to the living beings, the organized existences which are but mortal. Once from his perch he watched with much interest clouds of little birds of a kind unknown to him, which threw themselves on the ship like whirlwinds of black dust. They let themselves be caught and petted, being too exhausted to resist ; and all the sailors had some on their shoulders.

But soon the most exhausted of them began to die. They perished by thousands on the yards, in the port-holes, — the poor little things ! — under the fierce sun of the Red Sea.

These birds had come from over the great desert, driven by the tempest, and for fear of falling into the infinite blue which spread everywhere around, they flocked down, exhausted, with the last strength of their wings, upon the vessel that was passing by. Over

4 / Mother Nature had driven this excess of little birds away with a breath, with the same impassive indifference with which she treats a generation of men.

3 / They all perished on the heated iron-work of the ship ; and the deck was heaped up with their little bodies, which yesterday were throbbing with life and love and song. They looked like little black rags, with their wet feathers ; and Sylvestre and the other sailors gathered them up in their hands, compassionately spreading out their delicate bluish wings, and then swept them off into the sea and made an end of them.

Then came swarms of grasshoppers, descendants of those of the time of Moses ; and the ship was covered with them.

Then they sailed on several days more in the unchanging blue, and saw no other living thing except a few fishes flying over the surface of the waters.

CHAPTER X.

RAIN in torrents under a perfectly black and heavy sky. — that was India. Sylvestre had just had happened that he was in a small boat

country. Everything was magnificently green ; the leaves of the trees looked like gigantic feathers, and the people who walked by had great velvet eyes which seemed to droop under the weight of their lashes ; and the breeze which blew the rain about smelt of musk and of roses. Women beckoned to him, making signs which meant something like the "See here, pretty boy !" which he had heard so many times in Brest. But here in this enchanted land the invitation excited and thrilled him. Their superb figures could be seen outlined under their transparent muslin draperies ; and their skins were tawny and polished like bronze.

Hesitating and yet fascinated, he was beginning nevertheless to follow them step by step, when all at once he heard the pipe of the boatswain's whistle, trilling like a bird, calling him quickly back to his boat, which was leaving.

So he went on his way and bade adieu to the beauties of India.

Still another week on the blue sea, and they stopped at another land of greenness and moisture. A crowd of little yellow men, shouting and yelling like madmen, suddenly invaded the ship, bringing coal in baskets.

"Are we in China already?" asked Sylvestre, seeing that they all had monkey faces and pig-tails.

They said "no ;" he must wait a little longer. This was only Singapore. He went up aloft

again, to get out of the black dust which the wind blew about, while the coal from these thousand little baskets was being hurriedly thrown into the bunkers.

Finally one day they came to a country called Tourane, where they found at anchor a ship called the "Circe," which was blockading the harbor. It was the ship to which he had known he should be changed; and they put him on board with his bag.

He found countrymen among the crew, even two "Icelanders," who for the time being were serving as gunners.

In the evening, in that warm and quiet climate, where there is nothing whatever to do, they would assemble on deck in a group apart, away from the others, making a little Brittany among themselves. He had to pass five months of idleness and exile in this desolate bay, before the long-wished-for moment arrived for going into action.

CHAPTER XI.

PAIMPOL, the last day of February, and the evening before the departure of the fishermen for Iceland. Gaud was leaning up against the door of her room, motionless and very pale.

It was because Yann was downstairs, talking with her father. She had seen him come, and

she could hear indistinctly the sound of his voice.

They had not met the whole winter ; some fatality seemed always to keep them apart. After her journey to Pors-Even, she had built her hopes somewhat on the "Pardon" of the Icelanders, where there are many opportunities to meet and talk, in the market-place at evening among the various groups that stand around. But on the morning of the festival, after the streets had been hung with their white drapery and green garlands, a wretched rain began to pour down in torrents, driven from the west by a sobbing wind. So black a sky never had been seen over Paimpol. "Nobody will come from Ploubazlanec, that's sure," sadly exclaimed the girls whose sweethearts lived there. And come in fact they ~~did~~ not, or if they did, they took refuge immediately in the wine-shops. There was no procession, and no walking about ; and Gaud, with her heart more sad and oppressed than ever, sat behind her window all the evening, listening to the water trickling off the roofs, or to the noisy songs of the fishermen issuing from the wine-shops.

➤ She had been expecting this visit of Yann for several days, strongly suspecting that Father Gaos, who did not like coming to Paimpol, would send his son to see about the ship business which was not yet settled. And she had resolved to go and speak to him, although she knew it was not what girls usually did, to talk to him frankly and get

the matter off her mind. She would reproach him for having taken her up and then leaving her, as if he had no heart.

Obstinacy, rudeness, love of his seafaring life, or fear of being refused, if these obstacles indicated by Sylvestre were the only ones, they might be overcome, — why not? — after a frank conversation such as theirs would be. And then perhaps that pleasant smile would appear again, which would make everything right, — that same smile which had so surprised and charmed her during that night of the ball which she had spent waltzing in his arms; and this hope gave her courage and filled her heart with an almost gentle patience.

It always seemed so easy when it was in the future, so simple a thing to say and do.

And this visit of Yann happened very conveniently; she was sure that her father, who had just sat down to smoke, would not trouble himself to see him to the door; and then in the hall, where there would be nobody to disturb them, she could finally have her explanation with him.

But when the moment had really come, it seemed a terribly bold thing to do. The mere idea of meeting him, of seeing him face to face at the foot of the stairs, made her tremble. Her heart was beating as if it would burst, — and to think that at any moment that door down there might open, with the little creak she knew so well, to let him pass!

No, surely she would never dare to do it, rather would she eat her heart out in suspense and grief than attempt such a thing. She had already taken several steps to go back into the retirement of her own room to sit down and take up her work. Then she stopped again, hesitating in dismay at the thought that to-morrow was the day of the fishermen's departure for Iceland, and that this was the one and only chance she would have to speak to him. If she missed this, she would have to begin all over again those months of solitary waiting and longing for his return, and lose one whole summer more out of her life.

The door opened downstairs, and Yann came out. With a sudden resolution, she ran down the staircase, and stood trembling before him.

"Monsieur Yann, I would like to speak to you, if you please."

"To me, Mademoiselle Gaud?" said he, lowering his voice and touching his hat.

He looked at her somewhat defiantly out of his brilliant eyes, with his head thrown back, and a stern hard look came over his face, as if he hesitated whether to stop at all. With one foot in advance, ready to escape, he set his great shoulders against the wall, as if to get as far off from her as possible in the narrow passage where he had been caught.

Then, chilled by his manner, she could think of none of the things she had prepared to say to him; she had not thought that he could be so

rude to her as to go by without being willing to listen to her.

"Does our house frighten you, Monsieur Yann?" she asked in a strange hard voice, which was far different from the tone she had wished to use.

He turned his eyes away, and looked outside. His cheeks had become quite red, with a burning blush; and his expressive nostrils, dilating at each breath, followed the heaving of his chest, like a bull.

She tried to go on.

"The evening of the ball when we were together you bade me 'Au revoir' as if I was not quite indifferent to you. Monsieur Yann, you have forgotten, then. What have I done to you?"

The gusty west wind blew into the hall from the street, ruffled Yann's hair and the wings of Gaud's cap, and banged a door furiously behind them. This corridor was not a good place for discussing serious matters. After the first sentence, which choked in her throat, Gaud became quite mute, and turned away her head, unable to think of anything more.

They had gotten nearer the street door, he trying always to escape.

Outside, the wind was roaring loudly, and the sky was dark and lowering. A cold livid light fell full on their faces through the open door, and a neighbor looked in at them, thinking,

“What can they be saying, those two, there in the passage, looking so disturbed? What can be happening at the Mévels’?”

“No, Mademoiselle Gaud,” he replied at last, evading her with the quickness of an untamed animal. “I’ve already heard people talking about us in the country. No, Mademoiselle Gaud, you are rich. We don’t belong to the same kind of people; I am not the fellow to run after you, — no, not I.”

And with that he was gone. So this was the end of it all; it was all over forever. She had said nothing that she had meant to in this interview which had only served to make her appear bold and unwomanly in his eyes. What a fellow he was, this Yann, with his contempt of women, of money, of everything!

She remained fixed to the spot, while everything whirled dizzily around her.

And then suddenly another thought struck her, more intolerable than all the rest. These friends of Yann, these Icelanders who were strolling up and down the market-place, waiting for him, — suppose he should tell them about it and make fun of her! She ran up into her room again, to watch them from behind the curtains.

There was, in fact, a group of these men before the house. But they were merely watching the sky, which was becoming blacker and blacker all the time, and making conjectures about the heavy rain which threatened, saying, “It will only be

a shower. Let us go in and take a drink ; it will soon be over."

Then they began to make jokes in a loud voice about Jeannie Caroff and various other girls ; but nobody even looked toward her window.

They were all in good spirits, except Yann, who made no reply to their jokes, but remained quite grave and sad. He did not go in to drink with the others, but without noticing either them or the rain which was beginning to fall, he walked slowly away under the steady down-pour, as if lost in thought, crossing the market-place in the direction of Ploubazlanec.

And then she forgave him everything, and a feeling of hopeless tenderness took the place of the bitter anger which had first risen in her heart.

She sat down with her head in her hands. What could she do now?

Oh, if he only would have listened to her for one moment, if he would have gone with her into some room where they could have talked in peace alone together, everything might still have been explained !

She loved him enough to have dared to confess it to his face ; she would have said, " You sought me out when I cared nothing for you ; now I am yours with my whole soul, if you want me. See, I am not afraid of being the wife of a fisherman, and besides, I have only to choose, if I want a husband, among all the young men of Paimpol. But I love you, because in spite of

everything, I think you are better than the others. I am not quite poor ; I know that I am pretty ; and although I have lived in the city, I assure you that I am not a bad girl, and have never done anything very wrong. Now, when I love you so, why will you not take me ? ”

But all that would never be said, never except in fancy. It was too late ; Yann would never listen to her. Try to speak to him a second time ? Oh, never ! What kind of a creature would he take her for ? No ! she would rather die.

And to-morrow they were going off to Iceland.

Alone in her pretty room, in the cold white light of the February twilight, shivering in a chair by the wall on which she had thrown herself by chance, it seemed to her that the world was crumbling away from under her, together with all things present and to come, into a hopeless terrible abyss which was opening about her. She longed to be done with life, to be quietly asleep in her grave, to suffer no more ! But truly she forgave him ; and no bitterness mingled with her despairing love for him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE sea, the dull, gray sea.

Over that trackless way which leads the fisherman each year to Iceland Yann had been quietly

sailing for a day past. The evening before, when they had all departed, to the chant of the old hymns, a southerly wind was blowing; and the ships, with all sails set, had scattered far and wide like sea-gulls.

Then the breeze had died out; their pace became slower; and banks of fog began to travel low down over the surface of the sea.

Yann was a little more silent than usual perhaps. The calm weather oppressed him; he seemed to feel the need of action to chase away some preoccupation from his mind. But there was nothing to do but just to glide quietly along over the smooth waters,—nothing but just to breathe and exist. There was nothing to be seen but mysterious depths of enveloping gray fog, nothing to be heard but silence.

All of a sudden a dull sound struck upon the stillness,—a scarcely perceptible, but unusual sound, and one that came from below with a scraping sensation, as when one puts the brake on a carriage; and the “Marie” suddenly stopped dead.

“Aground! where, and on what?”

Some sand-bank on the English coast probably; but they had seen nothing since the evening before, on account of these curtains of fog.

The crew ran hurriedly about, their excited movements contrasting strongly with the sudden and rigid immovability of their boat. There the “Marie” was, stuck and unable to budge! In

the midst of this great watery world which in the muggy soft weather seemed to have scarcely any consistency at all, she had been caught by something unknown, but immovable and resisting, hidden under the water. She was caught fast, and was even in danger of being lost.

Who has not seen a poor bird or fly caught by its feet in bird-lime? At first it scarcely perceives it, and one notices no change; it must first discover that its feet are stuck in something and that it is in danger of never getting out of it. It is then that it begins to struggle, that the sticky substance begins to soil its wings and head; and then it takes on little by little that pitiful look of a thing in distress and near to death.

It was so with the "Marie;" in the beginning it did not seem to make much difference with her. She lay over a little to one side, it was true; but it was in the middle of the forenoon on a beautiful calm day, and one had to know what had happened to be at all disturbed, or to understand that there was anything in particular the matter.

It was almost pitiful to see the captain, whose fault it was, in not paying enough attention to where they were, as he kept wringing his hands and crying, "Ma Doué! ma Doué!" in a tone of despair.

Quite near them, as the fog lifted, they saw the outline of a cape which they did not recognize; and then the fog settled down again, and they could see it no longer.

Otherwise, there was nothing to be seen, — not a sail or a sign of smoke. For the present they were almost glad of it ; they were much afraid of the English wreckers, who would come to get them out of their trouble after their own fashion, and who are almost as bad as pirates.

They tried everything, shifting and changing the ballast. Turk, the dog, who was not in the least afraid of any motion of the vessel at sea, was very much disturbed by the affair. These noises from below, these rough shocks when the swell passed under, and then this stoppage ! — he understood perfectly well that it was something that was not natural, and hid himself in corners with his tail between his legs.

Then they got out the small boats, dropped anchor, and pulled with their united force on the hawsers, trying to haul her off, — a toilsome expedient which they tried for ten hours at a stretch. By evening the poor boat, which had come up so fresh and clean in the morning, was already in a sorry plight, flooded and dirty and in utter disorder. She had struggled and beaten herself, trying in every way to shake herself free, and still she stuck fast like a lifeless hulk.

The night was closing over them, the wind was rising, and the seas were rolling higher ; the prospect was getting worse and worse, when all at once, about six o'clock, they suddenly slid off the banks, breaking all the hawsers which had been stretched to hold them in position as they went.

And then the whole crew were to be seen running up and down the deck like madmen, shouting, —

“We are afloat!”

They were off indeed, and what words could express the joy of it! To feel themselves moving, and the boat becoming alive and light again, instead of being nearly a wreck, as they were but a short time ago!

Yann's sadness left him at the same moment. Relieved, like his boat, cured by the healthy labor of his arms, he regained his careless air and shook off his troublesome memories.

The morning after, when they had finished fishing up their anchors, he went on his way toward the frigid north with a heart apparently as free as in former years.

CHAPTER XIII.

OFF there, on board the “*Circe*” in the harbor of D'Ha-Long, at the other end of the world, a French mail was being distributed. In the middle of a group of sailors, who were crowding around him, the purser was loudly calling out the names of the fortunate ones for whom there were letters.

It was in the evening, on the gun-deck, and they pushed and shoved one another around the ship's lantern.

"Moan, Sylvestre." There was one for him, — one which was postmarked *Paimpol* clearly enough, but was not in Gaud's writing. What did that mean, and who was it from?

He turned it over and over and opened it almost timidly.

PLOUBAZLANEC, March 5, 1884.

MY DEAR GRANDSON, —

It was from his good old grandmother; he breathed more freely. At the end she had even scrawled her name, the only thing she could write, in big, shaky letters like a school-boy's, — "Widow Moan." "Widow Moan," — he raised the paper to his lips with an unconscious gesture, and kissed the poor name as if it were some sacred charm. The letter had come at the supreme hour of his life; to-morrow morning, at daybreak, he would be under fire.

It was in the middle of April; Bac-Ninh and Hong-Koa had just been taken. There was nothing important in prospect in Tonkin; nevertheless, the reinforcements which kept arriving were not considered sufficient; so they took from on board the ships all the men who could be spared, to complete the companies of marines that had already been landed. And Sylvestre, who had long pined in the blockading squadron, had been chosen among others to fill up the ranks of one of these companies.

At the moment, it is true, they were talking of

peace ; but something told them, nevertheless, that they would still land in time to do a little fighting. Having packed their knapsacks, finished their preparations, and said their good-byes, they walked up and down the whole evening among those who stayed behind, feeling very proud and important beside them. Each one showed his feelings about going in his own way ; some were grave and a little reserved, and some chattered noisily in the highest spirits.

As for Sylvestre, he was quite silent, and kept his impatience to himself ; only if one looked at him, a little reserved smile said plainly, " Oh, yes, I am here ; and to-morrow morning's the time." Of war and of battle he had as yet but an incomplete notion, but the idea of it fascinated him, as he came of a brave race.

Uneasy about Gaud, on account of the strange writing, he tried to find a lantern by which to read his letter.

It was a difficult matter among these groups of half-naked men, who were crowding him there, trying also to read their letters in the stifling heat of the gun-deck.

At the end of the letter, as he had expected, Grandmother Yvonne explained why she had been obliged to have recourse to the less practised hand of an old neighbor.

MY DEAR CHILD, — Your cousin is not writing this for me this time, for she is in great trouble. Her father died suddenly two days ago, and it ap-

pears that his fortune had been entirely eaten up by his unfortunate speculations last winter in Paris. The house and furniture are to be sold. It is a thing nobody in the country expected ever to see ; and I am sure, dear child, that it will be as great a grief to you as it is to me.

Young Gaos sends his regards to you ; he has re-engaged with Captain Guermeur on the " Marie," as usual, and they left for Iceland quite early this season. They set sail on the first day of this month, the evening before the great misfortune which befell our poor Gaud, and they know nothing about it yet. And so you will understand, my dear son, that it is all over now ; we will never see them married, for now she will have to work to earn her bread.

7 He stopped aghast. The bad news had spoiled all his pleasure in going into battle.





PART III.

CHAPTER I.



A BULLET whistling through the air !
Sylvestre stopped short and listened.
It was on a wide plain, all green and
velvety with spring, under a gray and
overhanging sky.

There were six armed sailors there, on a muddy path in a ricefield, reconnoitring.

Again ! the same sound in the still air, — a sharp, humming sound, a kind of prolonged *dzinn*, — giving one a very good impression of what kind of a hard, wicked little thing it was which flew past so quickly and so straight, and which might bring death with it.

For the first time in his life Sylvestre heard that music. Those shots which come toward you have a very different sound from those you fire yourself. The report of the gun at a great distance comes so faint as scarcely to be distinguished ; but the little whizzing sound of the

bullet as it flies toward you, grazing your ears, can be heard very clearly.

And *dzinn* again, and *dzinn*. There was a shower of bullets now all around the sailors, who had stopped short. The balls buried themselves in the wet soil of the ricefields, as they fell with a little quick, sharp sound, like hail, and with a slight splash of water.

They looked at one another and smiled as if it were an amusing farce, and said, —

“The Chinamen” (to sailors Annamites, Tonkinois, Pavillons-noirs, are all Chinamen).

And how their disdain, and the old, contemptuous grudge, and desire to fight them came out in the way they cried, “The Chinamen”!

Two or three more balls whistled by, lower down this time; they could see them bounding along like grasshoppers in the grass. The rain of bullets had scarcely lasted a minute; and it had already stopped. Over the great green plain dead silence came again; and they could see nothing stirring anywhere.

They stood up straight, all six, with watchful eyes, scenting the breeze, trying to discover where the shots could have come from.

From over there, surely, from that clump of bamboos, standing up in the midst of the plain like a little island of feathers, behind which, half-concealed, appeared the horned roofs of some huts. So they ran in that direction, their feet sinking and slipping in the wet soil of the rice-

field ; and Sylvestre, whose legs were longer and who ran quicker than the others, was the one who was ahead.

No whizzing sound now ; they almost thought they had been dreaming. And as in all the countries of the world some things are always the same, — the gray of the lowering skies, the fresh green of the meadows in spring, — you would almost have thought you saw the fields of France, and that these young men running along were playing at some other game than that of death.

But the nearer they got, the more clearly appeared the fine exotic foliage of the bamboo-trees, the strange curves of the village roofs, and the yellow men lying in ambush, their flat faces contracted with fear and hate, who with a yell deployed out into a long irregular line, which still looked steady and dangerous enough.

“The Chinamen,” said the sailors again, with the same brave smile.

All the same, they found there were enough of them, — too many, in fact ; and one of their number, turning around, saw others coming from behind, out of the grass.

How handsome he was, our little Sylvestre, that moment on that day ! His old grandmother would have been proud to see him so warlike and so brave. Two or three days had transformed him quite, and with his bronzed face and altered voice he seemed to be in his own proper element. For one moment, while bullets were flying about

them in every direction, they wavered, and had already begun the retreat, which would have meant death for every one of them.

Sylvestre; however, continued to advance, and taking his gun by the barrel, kept a whole group of the enemy at bay, sweeping his weapon from right to left with tremendous blows, which would have felled an ox; and thanks to him, the fortune of the day was changed; the panic, the terror, the something which decides blindly in all such little undirected skirmishes, took possession of the Chinese, and it was they who began to fall back.

It was over now. They were flying, and the six sailors, having rapidly reloaded, picked them off at their ease; and there were red stains in the grass, and fallen bodies and split skulls, with brains oozing out into the water of the field.

They ran, bent double and close to the ground, flattening themselves down like leopards; and Sylvestre ran after them, already wounded twice, with a spear-thrust in his thigh and a deep gash in his arm, but feeling nothing but the intoxication of battle, — that unreasoning frenzy of hot young blood which gives to simple men the superb courage of ancient heroes.

He whom he was pursuing turned around all at once to aim at him, with a sudden impulse of desperate fright; and Sylvestre stopped, smiling, contemptuous, and sublime, waiting for him to shoot, then threw himself to one side, seeing

the direction of his aim, but with the movement of the trigger, the muzzle of the gun swerved in the same direction, and then Sylvestre, feeling a shock in his breast, and understanding well what it was by intuition, turned around, even with all the pain, toward the other sailors, who were following him, trying to say like an old soldier the sacred phrase, "I think I'm done for."

With the deep breath that he was drawing, as he ran, to fill his lungs, he felt the air come in also through a hole in his breast, with a horrible little sound like that of a broken bellows; at the same moment his mouth filled with blood, and he felt a sharp pain in his side, which rapidly grew worse until it became frightful agony.

He turned dizzily around two or three times, trying to get his breath through all this red liquid which rose and choked him, and then fell heavily over in the mud.



CHAPTER II.

ABOUT a fortnight afterward, as the weather was already darkening, — for the rainy season and the heat had become more oppressive than ever in yellow Tonkin, — Sylvestre, whom they had brought to Hanoi, was sent by way of the port of D'Ha-Long to be put on board a hospital transport which was returning to France.

He had been carried about for a long time on various stretchers between ambulance stations. Everything possible had been done for him ; but under the unfavorable conditions, his lungs had filled with water on the wounded side, and air kept coming in with a little bubbling sound through the hole which would not close.

He had been awarded the military medal, and that had given him a moment's pleasure.

But he was no longer the soldier he had been, with his courageous air and his deep strong voice. No, all that had passed away with the prolonged suffering and the exhausting fever. He had become a homesick child again ; he scarcely spoke, and replied only to questions in a weak, soft voice which could scarcely be heard. To feel himself so ill, and so far, so very far away, to think of the days and days it would take before he could get home, — if he could only live till then, — but he was growing so weak !

This feeling of being terribly far away was a thing which constantly haunted him and disturbed his dreams ; and when after hours of torpor he felt again the terrible pain of his wounds, the burning of the fever, and the little wheezing sound of his pierced lung, then it was that he begged to be put on board and sent home at any risk. He was very heavy to lift in his cot, and in spite of their best endeavors, he was terribly shaken while he was being carried. Once on board the transport, which was on the point of

starting, they put him to bed in one of those little iron bedsteads which were ranged in lines as in a hospital, and so he began his long voyage back across the seas. Only this time, instead of living like a bird, perched up in the rigging among the breezes, it was in the oppressive atmosphere of between-decks, in the midst of mingled odors of medicines, wounds, and sickness.

During the first days the joy of starting homeward made him a little better. He could lie propped up in bed with pillows, and would sometimes ask for his box. This sailor's box was a little desk of white wood which he had bought in Paimpol to keep his treasures in. There was a letter from Grandmother Yvonne, several from Yann and Gaud, a copy-book in which he had written out some sailors' songs, and a book of Confucius in Chinese, — chance booty, on whose blank pages he had written his naïve journal of the campaign.

His wound, however, did not heal; and after the first week the surgeons decided that his life could not be saved. And now they were near the equator during the fearful heat of the rainy season. But the transport kept up her pace, shaking and shifting the beds, with their ill and wounded, sailing rapidly along over the rolling sea, which was still rough, as if a monsoon had lately passed over it.

Since their departure from D'Ha-Long more than one had died, whom they had been forced

to throw overboard with all his little belongings. On one day it was very dark in the floating hospital. They had been obliged, on account of the heavy sea, to shut the port-holes, and then the choking hole of the sick became more horrible than ever.

Sylvestre was worse ; the end had come. Lying always on his wounded side, he pressed it together with his two hands with all the remaining force he had, to try to keep the water still, which was destroying his right lung, while he endeavored to breathe only with the left. But little by little the other also had become affected, and the last agony had begun.

Dreams of his country haunted his dying brain ; and in the heated darkness figures whom he loved or feared came to bend over him. He was lost in a continuous delirious dream in which Brittany and Iceland passed ever before his eyes. In the morning he had asked for the priest,—an old man who had seen many sailors die, and who was amazed to find under that manly exterior the innocence of a little child.


Sylvestre kept asking for air, air, but there was none anywhere ; the air funnels gave no more, and the nurse, who fanned him constantly with a fan painted with Chinese flowers, only kept in motion over him the unhealthful atmosphere whose unwholesomeness had already been breathed over a hundred times until the lungs could no longer endure it.

Sometimes he would try desperately to get out of bed, where he knew so well that death was coming on, to get out into the open air above to try to live again ! Oh, those others running up there among the shrouds, and living among the rigging ! But all the mighty effort which he made only slightly raised his weak neck and head like a half movement in sleep. Oh, no, he could not ! he fell back again into the same hollow in his neglected bed, where death had already pinioned him ; and every time he made the effort, he lost for a moment consciousness of everything.


They had opened a port-hole to please him, although it was very dangerous, as the sea was still very high. It was about six o'clock in the evening, and when the iron port was raised, it was only light that came in, in red and dazzling rays. The sun appeared over the horizon in wonderful magnificence, through a rift in the sombre sky ; its blinding rays lay across the rolling sea, and lit up the rocking transport like a waving torch.

But no air came in ; the little there was, was too lifeless to enter in and drive away the fever fumes. Over the whole limitless surface of the equatorial sea, there was naught but warm dampness and breathless oppressiveness, — no air anywhere, not even for those who were gasping in death.


One last vision much disturbed Sylvestre, — his old grandmother going quickly along the street, hurrying fast with an expression of agonizing anxiety on her face, the rain falling over her



from dark and overhanging clouds, as she went to Paimpol, to learn from the Marine Office that he was dead.



He had come to his last struggle, and the death-rattle was in his throat. They sponged away the blood and water from the corners of his mouth, as it rose in floods from his lungs in those last agonized contortions. And still the splendid declining sun shone like a world on fire, tinging the clouds blood-red ; through the port-hole a great ray of red fire shot in, falling upon Sylvestre's bed and making a flaming nimbus around him.



At this same moment over there in Brittany they could also see the sun, as the clocks were striking noon. It was the very same sun, and at the same moment in its endless existence ; and yet it had a very different aspect, as quite high up in the bluish sky, it was shining with a soft white light on Grandmother Yvonne, sewing at her door.

In Iceland, where it was morning, they could see it too at this moment of death. It was still paler up there, and could only be seen, one would have said, by a sort of oblique *tour de force*. It was shining in a melancholy way over a fiord where the "Marie" was lying ; and the sky about it had that pure northern clearness, such as makes one think of frozen planets, swinging in airless space.

It brought out with a cold distinctness all the details of that stony chaos which is called Ice-

land ; and the whole country as seen from the "Marie" seemed to have been hewn out after one pattern, and to be kept there in motionless silence, and Yann, who was fishing as usual, looked a little strange in the curious light of this lunar landscape.

At the moment that this red beam which came through the port-hole was extinguished, as the equatorial sun disappeared under the gilded sea, the eyes of the dying boy turned upward, and then they closed the lids with their long lashes, and Sylvestre became calm again and very beautiful, like a recumbent statue.

CHAPTER III.

I CANNOT help recording the story of Sylvestre's funeral, which I conducted myself, away off there in the Island of Singapore. So many had had to be buried in the sea during the first days of the voyage, and this unhealthful country was then so near, that it had been decided to keep him a few hours longer so as to bury him there.

The ceremony took place very early in the morning, on account of the terrible sun. His body was covered with the flag of France, as it rested in the small boat which was conveying it to the land.

The great strange city lay still asleep, as we

rowed up ; and a little wagon, sent by the consul, awaited us on the quay. In it we put Sylvestre and the wooden cross which had been made on board. The paint was still fresh upon it, as the time had been so short, and the white letters of his name had run in streaks into the black background.

We crossed this land of Babel as the sun was rising, and were astonished to find there, only a step from the filthy, yelling Chinese crowd, the quiet of a French church. Under the 'high white roof where I stood alone with my sailors, the *Dies Iræ*, chanted by a missionary priest, sounded like some sweet magic incantation. Through the open door the world looked like an enchanted garden with its wonderful foliage and gigantic palms ; and as the wind shook the great flowering trees, a shower of carmine petals fell down just at the church door.

Afterward we went to the cemetery, which was very far away. Our little funeral cortège of sailors seemed a very modest one, but over the coffin still lay the flag of France. We had to cross the Chinese quarter, filled with swarms of yellow humanity, then through the streets where the Malays and Indians lived, where all types of Asiatic faces watched us with wondering eyes as we went by.

And then into the country, where it was already warm, through shadowy paths, where wonderful butterflies with blue, velvety wings were flying,

where flowers and palms grew luxuriantly in all the splendor of equatorial vegetation ; and finally we reached the cemetery, filled with tombs of mandarins, which were covered with many-colored inscriptions, dragons and monsters surrounded by marvellous foliage and unknown plants. The spot where we stopped looked like a corner out of the gardens of India.

Then we set up on his grave the little wooden cross, which had been so hastily put together during the night, and whereon was painted, —

SYLVESTRE MOAN,
aged nineteen years.

And there we left him, hurrying away on account of the sun, which was already high in the heavens, and only turning backward for one last look at the little cross under the wonderful trees and gigantic flowers.

CHAPTER IV.

THE transport went on its way across the Indian Ocean. Many wretched and ill were still shut up below in the floating hospital ; but on deck there was nothing but careless youth and good health, and all around them from across the sea a very festival of pure air and sunshine.

In the fair weather of the trade winds the sailors, stretched under the shadow of the sails,

would amuse themselves with their parrots, making them run about. (In Singapore, whence they had come, all kinds of birds and animals which the passing sailors buy for pets are offered for sale.) They had all chosen parrots, with baby expressions on their bird faces, which had no tails as yet, but were already green, — and what a green ! Their parents had doubtless been green ; and they had inherited the same color, and on the clean white deck of the vessel, they looked like very fresh leaves fallen from a tropical tree.

Sometimes the sailors would collect them all together ; and then the little creatures would look at one another in a very droll way, turning their heads about in every direction as if to examine one another from every point of view. They limped about as if they were lame, with very funny little hops, starting off all at once in a great hurry to get somewhere or other, and very often tumbling down.

Other sailors were teaching monkeys tricks, — another favorite amusement of theirs. Some of these little animals were greatly petted by the sailors, and would cling to the rough shoulders of their masters, looking up at them with almost human eyes, half pitiful, half grotesque.

On the stroke of three, the quarter-master brought up on deck two canvas sacks, sealed with large seals of red wax, and marked with the name of Sylvestre. All his clothes, and everything that

had belonged to him in the world, were to be sold at auction, according to the regulation with regard to the effects of the dead ; and the sailors gathered eagerly around. There are so many of these auctions on board naval hospital ships that the sailors are but little affected by them ; and then, besides, Sylvestre had been so little known on board. His jackets, his shirts, his blue-striped jerseys, were handled and turned over ; and some of them brought quite a sum, the sailors bidding up the price for the fun of the thing.

Then came the sacred little box, which was valued at fifty sous. They had taken out the letters and the military medal to send them to his family ; but the copy-book with the songs, the book of Confucius, the needles, buttons, and all the little things which Grandmother Yvonne had put in for his mending and repairing, were still left in it. Then the quarter-master, who was holding up the various articles for sale, exhibited two little Buddhas taken from a pagoda as a present for Gaud, which looked so absurd that the sailors roared with laughter to see them put up as the last lot. But if these sailors laughed, it was not for lack of feeling, but simply because they were thoughtless.

Finally the bags themselves were sold, and the purchaser began to rub off the name on them, so that he could put on his own in its place.

And afterward they carefully swept the deck to clear it of what remained of dust or ends of thread

after the unpacking. And then the sailors gayly went back to their amusements, — to their parrots and their monkeys.

CHAPTER V.

ONE day in the first half of the month of June, as old Yvonne was going back toward her cottage, her neighbors told her that some one from the commissioner of the navy department had been to see her.

It was something about her grandson, of course, but that caused her no anxiety. The families of seafaring people are always having business with the department, and she, who had been daughter, wife, mother, and grandmother of sailors, had been known at the office for nearly sixty years.

It was something about his commission, no doubt, or some little debt which he had incurred on board the "Circe," which would have to be paid. Knowing what was due to "Monsieur le Commissaire," she dressed herself carefully in her Sunday dress and a white cap, and then set out about two o'clock. She walked quite briskly along the cliff-path toward Paimpol, really a little anxious when she came to think it over, because of not having had any letters for two months. She went by her old lover, sitting at his doorway, much aged since the frosts of the winter before.

“Well, when you are ready, you know, — don’t trouble yourself, my beauty.” That old joke about the dress of wooden boards was still running in his head.

The bright June day was smiling all about her. On the high rocky places there is never anything but low furze and golden-rod ; but as soon as one comes down into the little hollows which are sheltered from the sharp sea-breeze, one finds immediately beautiful fresh verdure, hedges of flowering thorn, and tall and fragrant grasses. But she scarcely noticed it all, so old was she, and so many changing seasons had passed over her head that now they seemed hardly more than so many days to her.

About the hamlets and their houses, with dark and sunken walls, grew roses, pinks, and asters, and a myriad little wild-flowers, which grew nearly up to the roofs of thatch or moss, and were just spreading out their tiny petals.

There was no love-making in the springtime in this country of the Icelanders ; and the beautiful girls of this proud race, who were to be seen dreaming and absent-minded at the cottage doors, seemed to be gazing with their eyes of blue and brown far away beyond the visible things which surrounded them. The young men to whom went out their thoughts and longing were away fishing off there in the northern sea.

But it was spring just the same, awakening the senses with its balmy mildness, noisy with the

hum of insects and fragrant with the odor of new flowers.

And all this soulless and unconscious Nature smiled out at the old grandmother who was walking on as fast as she could to hear of the death of her last remaining grandson. The moment had come when that terrible thing which had happened so far away on the Chinese sea was to be told her; she was taking that ill-fated journey which Sylvestre had seen as he was dying, and which drew from his eyes their last agonizing tears, — his good old grandmother, called to the department at Paimpol to hear that he was dead. He had seen her clearly, as she went along the road, walking on very straight and fast, with her little brown shawl, her great cap, and her umbrella. And this was the vision which had made him raise his head and struggle in awful agony, while the great red sun of the equator, as it set in flaming splendor, was shining through the port-hole of the transport, watching him die.

Only off there in his last vision he had seen the poor old woman walking under a rainy sky, while on the contrary it was a beautiful, mocking spring day.

As she drew nearer to Paimpol, she became more and more anxious, and hurried along still faster.

Finally she reached the little gray town with its narrow streets deserted by the sun, and said good-day to other old women, her contemporaries, who

were sitting at their windows. They were surprised to see her, and said to each other, "Where can she be going so quickly in her Sunday dress, on a week-day?"

The commissioner of the department was not in; only a very ugly little boy about fifteen years old, who was his clerk, was there, seated at a desk.

As he was too ill-formed to become a fisherman, he was being taught to write, and spent his days on this one chair, in black over-sleeves, scratching away at his paper.

When she had given him her name, he got up with an air of importance and took some stamped papers out of a pigeon-hole.

There were a number of them. What could that mean? Certificates and papers with seals, and a sailor's account-book, yellowed by the sea-air, all seeming to have an odor of death about them.

He opened them out before the poor old woman, who was beginning to tremble and to suspect that something was wrong. It was because she had recognized two of the letters which Gaud had written for her to her grandson, and which had come back to her unopened. And this same thing had happened twenty years before, when her son Pierre had died, — letters had been sent back to the department from China and returned to her.

He was reading now in an official tone, —

“ Moan, Jean Marie Sylvestre, entered at Paimpol, folio 213, number 2091, deceased on board the ‘ Bien-Hoa,’ the 14— ”

“ What — what has happened to him, my good gentleman? ”

“ Deceased, — he is deceased,” he repeated.

He was not a bad boy, this clerk, and if he told her brutally, it was rather on account of his lack of judgment or his stupidity ; and seeing that she did not understand this fine word, he explained it in Breton, —

“ Marw-éo.”

“ Marw-éo,” — he is dead.

She said it after him in her quivering old voice, like a poor cracked echo, repeating some unimportant phrase.

It was indeed what she had half suspected, and that suspicion alone had made her tremble ; but now that it was certain, she did not seem to be much affected by it. In the first place, her capacity for suffering was really somewhat dulled on account of her age, particularly since the last winter. The pain did not come directly. And then something was confusing her brain ; for the moment she was confounding this death with others which had happened long ago ; she had lost so many sons. It took her a moment to remember that this was her last, her darling, on whom had been spent all her prayers, her life, her hopes, and her thoughts already so dulled by the approach of second childhood.

She was ashamed of showing her grief before this disagreeable little boy. Was this the way to announce a grandchild's death to his grandmother?

She stood up stiffly against the desk, pulling at the fringe of her brown shawl with her poor chapped hands. And how far away from home she seemed ! Dear God, what a way she would have to go quietly and decently before she could reach the hut where she so longed to hide herself like a wounded animal which runs to earth to die ! It was because she was terrified at the thought of this long way home that she forced herself not to think about it too much, or to really take it in.

They gave her an order for the thirty francs which came to her from the sale of Sylvestre's things, then the letters, the certificates, and the box which contained the military medal ; and she took them awkwardly with her trembling fingers, changing them from one hand to the other as she fumbled for her pocket.

She went straight through Paimpol without seeing anybody, bent over as if she were going to fall, and feeling the blood rushing into her ears,—hurrying, driving on, like a poor old machine which is pushed to its highest speed for the last time, without any one troubling about its breaking down.

At the end of the third mile, she was walking all bent over and completely exhausted ; every

now and then her sabot struck against a stone, giving her a painful shock ; but she still hurried on to shut herself up at home, ever fearful lest she might fall and have to be carried there.

CHAPTER VI.

“SEE old Yvonne ; she ’s drunk !”

She had fallen ; and the street-boys were running after her. It was just at the point where the parish of Ploubazlanec begins, and there are many houses along the road. But she still had enough strength to get up again, and went limping away with the aid of her stick.

“Old Yvonne ’s drunk !”

The impudent youngsters peered into her face and laughed. Her cap was fallen all to one side. There were some of them who were not so bad at heart ; and when they had seen the look upon the old face, which was contorted with despair, they ran away, frightened and sorry, not daring to say another word.

Once at home, with the door shut, she uttered the cry of distress which had been choking her, and let herself fall into a corner, with her head against the wall. Her cap had fallen over her eyes, and she threw it on the ground, her poor cap, always so scrupulously taken care of. Her best Sunday dress was all soiled, and a thin, yellowish-

white lock of hair escaped from her comb and fell over her shoulders, completing her wretched disorder.

CHAPTER VII.

IT was thus that Gaud found her when she came over to inquire about her in the evening, with her hair quite undone, her head against the wall, her face drawn with anguish, uttering a plaintive cry like a little child. She could scarcely weep; these very old women have few tears in their dry eyes.

“My grandson is dead!”

And she threw the letters, papers, and the medal into Gaud’s lap.

Gaud glanced quietly through them, seeing that it was indeed true, and then threw herself on her knees to pray.

So the two women remained mutely kneeling while the June twilight lingered. In Brittany the twilight is very long; and off there in Iceland it never ends at all. The cricket, which brings good luck, kept up its shrill piping on the hearth; and the yellow light of evening shone through the window into this cottage of the Moans, all of whom the sea had taken, and who were soon to become an extinct race.

At last Gaud said —

“I will come myself, dear grandmother, and live with you. I will bring my bed, which they left me, and will stay with you and take care of you ; you shall not be left alone !”

She wept for her little friend Sylvestre ; but the thought of another intruded itself upon her grief in spite of herself, — that one who was fishing so far away.

Yann, — he would have to be told that Sylvestre was dead ; the messenger boats would be leaving just at the right time to take him the news. Would he shed just one tear for him ? Perhaps, for he loved him well. In the midst of her own tears she could not forget, as she thought of him, sometimes bitterly, and sometimes with relenting tenderness, that this sorrow was coming to him also, and it almost seemed a bond of union between them ; in fact, her heart was full of him.

CHAPTER VIII.

ONE pale August evening, the letter announcing to Yann the death of his brother finally arrived on board the “Marie” in the northern sea ; it was after a day of rough sailing and great fatigue, just at the moment when he was going below to get his supper and go to bed. With eyes heavy with sleep he read it through, down in the dim

cabin by the yellow light of the little lamp, and at the first moment he too seemed stunned and stupefied, as if he could not take it in. As he was always unusually reserved and proud about anything that he felt deeply, he hid the letter under his blue jersey next his breast, as sailors do, without saying a word to any one.

Yet he found he did not feel like sitting down to supper with the others, and not deigning to explain why, he threw himself into his bunk and fell asleep. And then he dreamed that Sylvestre was dead, and that his funeral cortège was passing by.

About midnight, being in that state of mind which is peculiar to sailors, who know the time in their sleep, and who feel the moment approaching when they must get up for their watch, he was still seeing this burial, and said to himself, "I am dreaming ; fortunately, I'll have to wake up soon, and then it will go away."

But when a rough hand was laid on him, and a voice called, "Gaos, get up ! it's time to relieve the watch," he heard the paper rustle against his breast, — a mournful little sound, which made him realize the sad truth. "Oh, yes ! the letter ; it was true, then !" and a sharper, more cruel pain shot through his heart ; and as he hastily arose, in his sudden awakening he struck his head against the beams of his bunk.

Then he dressed, and lifting the hatch-cover, went up on deck to resume his fishing.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN Yann had gotten up on deck he looked about him with his half-opened eyes, out over the great familiar circle of the sea.

On that night, its grandeur wore an aspect of wonderful simplicity; and its neutral tints gave only the impression of depth and distance.

That horizon which marks no region of the earth, nor yet any geological period, must have worn this same look unnumbered times since the creation of the world, when the eye which seeks finds nothing, — nothing but the eternity of the material things that are and cannot choose but be.

The darkness of the night was relieved by a dim, vague radiance which came from one knew not whence, and about the vessel the wind was sighing its aimless, eternal lament.

And all around was a melting grayness which the eye could not penetrate; so does the slumbering sea love to veil, under quiet nameless tints, her mighty and mysterious repose. Vaporious clouds floated on high, as formless as material things can be, and in the dim light seeming to cover the sky like a great veil.

But at one point in the heavens, low down near the horizon, there appeared a sort of wavy brightness, distinct though distant, — an indefinite

design, traced as by some careless hand ; a work of chance, not meant to be looked at, fugitive and vanishing. And this alone, in all the circumference of sea and sky, seemed to have a meaning ; one would almost have said that the melancholy thought of this vast silence was written there, whither the eye was at last unconsciously drawn. ✓✓

The more Yann's quick eyes became accustomed to the dim light outside, the more he gazed at this single drawing in the sky, and it seemed to him to assume the shape of a vanishing figure with two outstretched arms ; and now that he had begun to look at it, it seemed to him quite like a human shape magnified to a gigantic size from having come so far. And then in his imagination, where floated together inexpressible dreams and superstitious beliefs, this melancholy shadow, sunk in the edge of the cloudy sky, intermingled itself gradually with the memory of his dead brother like a last manifestation of his spirit. He was accustomed to the strange association of images which is characteristic of the early part of life and of childish minds ; but words, however vague, are still too definite to express such thoughts, and one needs that uncertain language which we sometimes speak in dreams, and of which nothing remains to us on waking, but puzzling, incoherent fragments. As he watched this cloud, he felt a deep sadness come over him, — a sadness agonizing, mysterious, and hitherto unknown, which stopped the beating of his heart ; and now for the

first time he seemed really to understand that he should never, never see his little brother again. The sorrow which had been long in piercing that hard stern heart of his had entered now and filled it full. He saw once more the sweet face of Sylvestre with its innocent, childish eyes, and when he thought of that meeting and embracing which never more would be, something like a veil suddenly fell before his eyes in spite of himself. At first he did not know what it was, having never wept since he was a child ; but the great tears began to rain down his cheeks, and his deep chest heaved with sobs.

He went on fishing very rapidly, without stopping or saying a word ; and the others, who heard him in the silence, refrained from showing that they noticed him, for fear of annoying him, knowing how proud and reserved he was. According to his idea, death was the end of everything. He had always been accustomed, out of deference, to join in the prayers for the dead at home ; but he had no belief in the immortality of the soul.

When sailors talk among one another, they all say the same thing in a short and decided way, as if everybody knew it ; nevertheless, it does not prevent them from having a vague dread of ghosts and fear of cemeteries, and an entire confidence in saints and protecting images, or an instinctive veneration for the sacred ground around churches.

And then Yann always expected that the sea would claim him, and that then he would be lost in utter annihilation; and the thought that Sylvestre was away over there in that distant land made his sorrow still more hopeless and profound.

With his disregard of other people, he wept without shame or constraint, as if he had been alone.

Outside, it was getting lighter over the empty sea, although it was hardly more than two o'clock, and at the same time the distances seemed to extend immeasurably.

In this strange false dawn, the eyes open still wider, and the awakening mind better understands the immensity of the distances; and the limits of visible space retreat still more, fleeing ever before the sight.

It was a pale, pale light, which gradually grew brighter, seeming to come in little jets, with slight and sudden shocks; it made the heavens look as if they were being illuminated like a transparency, and as if lamps with white flames were being raised, little by little, little by little, behind the shapeless gray clouds, — carefully raised with mysterious caution, for fear of disturbing the mournful repose of the sea.

That great white lamp over there, over the horizon, was the sun, weakly dragging itself along before making its slow cold journey over the icy waters, which it must begin in the early morning.

But that morning there were no rosy tints of dawn in all the sad pale sky, and on board the "Marie" a strong man was weeping.

These tears shed by his wild brother and the deep melancholy of the outside world were the only tribute of grief paid to the memory of the poor, obscure little hero on these Iceland seas where half his life had been spent.

At daybreak Yann roughly dried his eyes with the sleeve of his woollen jersey, and wept no more. It was over. He seemed to become absorbed again in his fishing, by the monotonous habits of every-day life, and to think no more about his grief. And they were in the midst of a large shoal of fish just then, and their arms were hardly strong enough to pull them in.

Round about the fishermen, in the deep distances, the aspect of the world was again changing. The mighty unveiling of the universe, the great spectacle of dawn, was finished.

Now, on the contrary, the visible space seemed to contract and to be closing in. How could one, just before, have thought the sea so limitless? The horizon appeared now quite close, and it seemed as if there was hardly room enough. The open sky was soon filled with those floating veils,—some more vague than clouds; and some with fringed outlines just distinguishable. They fell softly, like white and airy gauze, into the infinite stillness; but they were falling all the same, and very soon closed thickly about them,

until the atmosphere became almost oppressively overcharged.

It was the first August fog which was coming up, and in a few minutes the mist became everywhere equally thick and impenetrable ; and about the "Marie" there was nothing to be seen but a pale white dampness, through which the daylight filtered dimly, and through which they could scarcely see the masts and rigging. "Here's the sea fog come at last," the men said.

They had long been acquainted with this inevitable accompaniment of the second period of fishing ; but it meant also the end of the Iceland season, and that the time had come for them to start on their way back to Brittany.

It gathered on their beards in bright little drops, and made their bronzed faces shine with moisture ; and when they looked at one another from opposite ends of the vessel, they seemed like phantoms, while on the other hand, objects which were quite near by appeared larger than ever in the dull white light.

They took care not to breathe with their mouths open, for then a feeling of cold and wet penetrated the lungs.

At the same time the fishing proceeded faster than ever, and not a word was spoken as the heavy haul went on.

Every moment heavy large fish were pulled in and thrown on the deck with a sound like the lash of a whip, madly flapping their tails about,

until everything was splashed with salt water and covered with the fine silver scales they shed in struggling.

The sailor who was cutting them open with his great knife gashed his fingers in his hurry, and the bright red blood mingled with the salt and the brine.

CHAPTER X.

THEY stayed there this time ten days together, caught in the thick fog, and seeing nothing. The fishing continued good, and they were too busy to talk. From time to time, at regular intervals, one of them blew on a fog-horn, which gave out a sound like the bellow of a wild beast.

And sometimes, from far in the depth of the white mist, another bellowing like it would answer to their call. And then the man on the lookout was more watchful than ever; and if the sound came nearer, all ears listened for the unknown neighbor, whom they would probably never be able to see, but whose proximity was nevertheless a danger.

And they would make conjectures as to what ship it could be, and that made an occupation for them; it seemed a sort of company for them, and they tried hard in their eagerness to see something, to look through the impalpable white

muslin curtains which hung everywhere about them in the air.

Then the sound would retreat, and the bellowings of the trumpet die away and be lost in the dull distance; and they would find themselves alone again in the deep stillness, in the midst of the infinite motionless mist. Everything became impregnated with water and dripped with salt and brine. The cold became more penetrating; the sun hung still lower over the horizon; and they began to have two or three hours of real night, which closed in over them with a gray and sombre chill. Every morning they took soundings for fear lest the "Marie" might drift upon some island on the Iceland coast; but all the lines on board the "Marie" put together did not touch bottom, and so they knew that they were well out to sea in good deep water.

Their life, though rough, was a healthy one; and the biting cold made their evenings seem more comfortable, and heightened the pleasant feeling of warmth and shelter which they found on going down into their massive oak cabin to sleep or eat.

During the day, these men, who were more isolated than cloistered monks, talked little to one another. They would stay hours and hours at the same post, each holding his line, their arms alone occupied in the constant work of fishing. Though only separated by two or three yards, they finished by taking no notice of one another.

The calm of the fog and its white obscurity

had dulled their brains. While fishing, they would sing some old ballad, but softly, under their breath, for fear of frightening away the fish.

Their thoughts came very slowly, and there were fewer of them, seeming to expand and stretch themselves out, in order to fill up the time without leaving any gaps or intervals of blankness in the mind.

And sometimes their thoughts wandered off into incoherent and marvellous dreams, as if in sleep; and the woof of these dreams was as vague and floating as a vapor.

This foggy month of August always brought the Iceland season thus quietly and sadly to an end. Still the same vigorous physical existence went on, expanding the lungs of the sailors and hardening their muscles.

Yann had quite recovered his usual manner, and seemed to have forgotten his sorrow. Watchful and alert, prompt in action both in fishing and managing the ship, he went about his work with the easy, careless manner of one who has no troubles; and with the others he was communicative only when he chose to be, — which was not often, — and always held his head high, with an air at once indifferent and commanding.

In the evening, in the warm oaken cabin, over which the china Virgin presided, when he was seated at table with his great knife in his hand before some good hot dish, he sometimes laughed as before at the funny things the others said.

Perhaps he did still think a little in secret of this Gaud whom Sylvestre in his last feeble agonizing thoughts had doubtless given to him as his wife, — of this girl who was now left quite poor and alone in the world; and perhaps in the depths of his heart he still mourned for his brother. But this heart of Yann was virgin soil, ungoverned and untamed, and gave no outward sign of what went on within.

CHAPTER XI.

ONE morning, about three o'clock, as the crew of the "Marie" were dreamily fishing away under the fog, they heard a sound as of some one speaking in a voice which seemed strange and unfamiliar. Those who were on deck looked questioningly at one another as much as to say, "Who was that speaking?"

Nobody; no one had said anything, and in fact, it seemed as if the voice came from the empty air.

Then the man who had charge of the fog-horn, and who had neglected to blow it since the evening before, rushed for it and blew with all his might the signal of alarm.

That alone was enough to startle one in this deep silence. And then, as if some apparition had been evoked by the hoarse sound of the

horn, a great gray shape suddenly rose out of the fog, towering threateningly near them, — a shadowy vessel, with masts, yards, and rigging, appearing all at once before their sight like those pictures which are flashed on a sheet from a stereopticon. And other men appeared there close enough to be touched, leaning over the bulwarks with wide-open startled eyes, as if in a sudden awakening of terrified surprise.

The men of the “Marie” seized oars, juremasts, and boat-hooks, or whatever they could find in the fore-castle which was long and strong enough, and laid them out over the side of the vessel to keep these visitors at a distance. And the others, equally frightened, pushed out enormous poles to keep them off.

But there was only a slight cracking of the yards over their heads. The rigging caught for a moment, but separated immediately without any damage being done. The shock, which would have been very slight in any case, on account of the calm, was scarcely felt.

It had been indeed so slight that it seemed really as if that other ship was an airy, yielding thing, almost without weight or substance.

And then, the danger being past, the men began to laugh, as they recognized one another.

“The ‘Marie,’ ahoy!”

“Holloa, Gaos, Laumec, Guermeur!”

The apparition was the “Reine Berthe,” Captain Larvoër, also of Paimpol; and the sailors were

from the outlying villages. That big fellow there with the black beard, who showed his teeth when he laughed, was Kerjégou, a native of Ploudaniel, and the others were from Plounès or Plounérin. X

"Well, why did n't you blow your fog-horn, you crew of savages?" demanded Larvoër of the "Reine Berthe."

"And why did n't you, you pirates, spongers and scum of the sea?"

"Oh! as for us, that's a different matter. We are forbidden to make any noise."

He made this reply in a manner which seemed to imply some dark mystery, and with a strange smile which the crew of the "Marie" often afterward recalled and pondered over long. And then, as if he had said too much, he ended off with a joke, —

"And as for our fog-horn, that fellow over there has cracked it for us blowing through it."

And he pointed to a sailor with the face of a Triton, who seemed to be all neck and chest, with little short legs, and something inexpressibly grotesque and frightful in his powerful deformity.

And while they lingered there, looking at one another, and waiting for some breeze or current to separate them, they chatted together. They were all leaning over the side, still holding their long poles, looking like besiegers with their pikes, while they talked of home affairs, the last letters brought by the messenger boats, their old parents, and their wives.

"My wife," said Kerjégou, "has written me that she has just had the baby we were expecting; we'll have a dozen pretty soon."

Another one had had twins; and a third announced the marriage of pretty Jeannie Caroff, a girl very well known among the Icelanders, to a certain rich old dotard of the parish of Pleurivo.

They saw one another as if through white gauze, and their voices also sounded dull and distant.

But Yann could not take his eyes off one of the fishermen, — a little old man whom he had never seen anywhere before, and who nevertheless spoke to him directly, saying, "Holloa, big Yann!" with the air of an intimate acquaintance. He was as irritatingly ugly as a monkey, and had the same malicious twinkle in his sharp eyes.

Then Larvoër, of the "Reine Berthe," said, "They have written me of the death of old Yvonne Moan's grandson from Ploëubazlanec, who was serving his time, as you know, with the Chinese squadron, and a very great pity too!"

Hearing this, the rest of the "Marie's" crew looked toward Yann to see if he had heard the bad news.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, with a careless, haughty air; "it was in the last letter that my father wrote me."

They all looked at him; and this curiosity

about his sorrow annoyed him. The questions flew thick and fast across the pale mists while the moments of their strange encounter were passing.

"My wife wrote me at the same time," continued Larvoër, "that the daughter of M. Mével has left the town to live at Ploubazlanec, and take care of old Mother Moan, her great-aunt, and that she has begun to go out to work by the day to earn her living. It's always been my opinion that she is a good and a brave girl, in spite of her young-lady airs and her finery."

Then they all looked at Yann again, which provoked him still farther; and a red flush showed under the dark tan of his cheeks.

With this praise of Gaud was ended the conversation with the "Reine Berthe," which no living being ever would see again.

For an instant their vanishing faces showed dimly in the fog as the ships drifted slightly apart, and then suddenly the crew of the "Marie" saw that there was nothing at the end of their long poles. Their spars, oars, masts, and yards trembled a moment in the empty air, and then fell heavily one after the other into the sea, like great lifeless arms. The "Reine Berthe," plunging into the fog, had suddenly and completely disappeared, as the picture fades out of a transparency when the light is blown out. They tried to hail her, but there was no response to their calls, except a kind of mocking clamor as of

many voices, ending in a groan which made them turn and look at one another in surprise.

The “Reine Berthe” did not come back with the other Iceland boats, and as the crew of the “Samuël-Azénide” came across a piece of wreck in a fiord, about which there could be no doubt, — the crown on her stern and a piece of her keel, — they gave up expecting her ; and after the month of October the names of all her crew were inscribed on black tablets in the church.

But after this last appearance, whose date the crew of the “Marie” well remembered, until the time of the return, there had been no bad weather at all on the Iceland sea, while on the other hand, three weeks before, a gale from the west had swept away several sailors, and sunk two ships.

And they called to mind Larvoër’s strange smile ; and putting one thing with another, a great many conjectures were made. Yann remembered more than once by night the sailor with the evil monkey eyes ; and some of the “Marie’s” crew asked themselves timidly if on that morning they had not been talking with the dead.

CHAPTER XII.

THE summer drew on to a close ; and the end of August, with its early morning mists, saw the Icelanders returning.

For three months past, the two lone women had lived together in the Moans' cottage at Ploubazlanec. Gaud had taken the place of a daughter in this poor nest of lost sailors. She had brought with her all that had been left her after the sale of her father's house, — her pretty bed with its curtains, and her gowns of various colors. She had made herself a new black dress, very plain and simple, and wore a mourning cap of thick plaited muslin, like old Yvonne.

She went out to sew by the day at the houses of the rich people of the town, and came home at night, without being disturbed by any impertinent admirers, remaining even a little haughty, and being still treated like a young lady, the lads of the village touching their caps to her as she went by, as they had always done.

In the lovely summer twilights, as she came home from Paimpol, she would walk along the cliff-path, and breathe in long draughts of the quieting sea-air. Her days at the needle had not yet impaired her beauty, as they do those who spend all their lives bending over their work ; and as she looked off over the sea, she drew up the beautiful lithe figure which she had inherited from her race, gazing off over that ocean on whose mighty depths Yann was sailing.

This same path led to where he lived ; going on a little farther toward a certain region, rockier and more windswept than this, one would arrive at that hamlet of Pors-Even, where

the moss-covered trees, growing small between the rocks, bend before the mighty blasts of the west wind. She would probably never go again to Pors-Even, — although it was scarcely a league away, — but she had been there once, and this visit had left a charm for her over all the way.

Besides, Yann must often pass that way, and she would be able to follow him from the door, coming and going over the flat country, among the low furze-bushes. And so she loved this whole region of Ploubazlanec, and was almost glad that fate had cast her there, feeling that she could better endure her life there than anywhere else.

At this time in the end of August, there is a languid feeling in the air which seems to come northward from the tropical countries ; the evenings are clear and bright, and reflections from that great burning sun of other lands fall even upon the Breton sea, and very often the air is still and clear without a cloud.

At the time Gaud usually returned home the day was melting into night, and things began to grow indistinct and to stand out darkly against the sky. Here and there a clump of furze stood up among the rocks like a bunch of ruffled feathers, or a group of gnarled trees formed a dark mass of shadow in a hollow, or perhaps a little hut with a thatched roof raised its low dwarfed silhouette above the ground. At the crossways, ancient figures of Christ, standing guard

over the land, stretched out their blackened arms upon their crosses, like living men in torture ; and in the distance the waters of the Channel shone out clear and distinct like a great golden mirror under a sky which was already darkening toward the horizon.

Even the fair weather and the calm seem melancholy in this country, for there always remains a feeling of restlessness over all, — an anxiety which comes from that sea to which so many lives are confided, and whose eternal menace is but slumbering.

As Gaud walked dreamily along, she found her way home in the open air always far too short ; the salty odor of the beach mingled with the sweet fragrance of the little flowers growing along the cliff among the tall gaunt thistles, and if it had not been for Grandmother Yvonne, who was waiting for her at home, she would have willingly loitered along the paths among the furze, like the pretty girls who love to dream away their summer evenings in the fields.

And as she walked along this country some memories of her childhood doubtless came to her, but now everything had faded away, was lost, indeed, and forgotten in her great love.

She preferred in spite of everything to think of Yann as her sweetheart, — a lover contemptuous and untamed, who never would be hers, but to whom her heart remained faithful all the same, and never would be given to another. For the

time she was glad to know that he was in Iceland ; there at least, the sea would keep him in her deep cloisters, and he could not belong to any one else.

One of these days, he would be coming back, she knew ; but she contemplated that return more calmly than before. Instinctively she comprehended that her poverty would not make him more disdainful of her, for he was not like other men ; and the death of poor little Sylvestre was certainly a bond of sympathy between them. When he came back he could not fail to come to their cottage to see the grandmother of his friend ; and she had decided that she would be there when he came. It did not seem to her that that would be undignified ; and without appearing conscious of the past, she would speak to him like an old friend, she would talk with him even affectionately, as to Sylvestre's brother, and try to seem perfectly natural. And who knows ? she might perhaps even take the place of a sister to him, now that she was so alone in the world, might rely upon his friendship, asking it of him as an aid and help, speaking clearly enough so that he could not think she had any thought of marriage behind her words. She thought him only rude, with his obstinate ideas of independence, but frank and kind and capable of understanding what was spoken from the heart. What would he think when he found her living in this almost ruined cottage, and so poor ? Very poor indeed,

oh, yes ! — for Grandmother Moan, being no longer able to work all day at the laundry, had nothing left her now but her widow's pension ; it is true she needed very little to eat at her age, and the two could still manage so as not to have to ask any favors of anybody.

It was always dark when Gaud arrived home ; before entering the house, one had to go down a little over the worn stones, as the cottage was situated just below the Ploubazlanec road, on a piece of ground which sloped toward the shore. It was almost hidden under a thick roof of brown thatch, all sunken in, and looking like the back of some enormous beast, fallen down under the weight of its heavy coat. Its walls had the dull color and the roughness of the rocks, with moss and lichens growing over them in little green tufts ; one went up the three sunken steps leading to the threshold, and opened the inside latch of the door with a bit of tarred string which hung out of a hole.

On entering, one saw first of all the dormer-window cut deeply in the wall as if in the thickness of a rampart, and looking toward the sea, through which came a last ray of pale yellow light. In the fireplace were burning little fragrant bundles of pine and fir, which old Yvonne collected in her walks along the paths ; and she herself was seated there attending to their little supper. At home she only wore a comb in her hair, to save her caps ; and her still pretty profile

was outlined against the red firelight. As Gaud entered, the old woman looked up with eyes which were once brown, but now had faded to a dull blue, which saw clearly no longer, but were troubled, wandering, and uncertain with age; and she always made the same remark, —

“Dear me, my girl, how late you are this evening!”

“Oh, no, Grandmother,” Gaud pleasantly replied, being used to the exclamation. “It’s no later than usual.”

“Ah, it seemed to me, my dear, it seemed to me that it *was* later than usual.”

They took their supper on a table which was so old that it had almost lost the look of a table, but was still as solid as the trunk of a great oak; and the cricket never failed to pipe up with its little silvery note. One of the sides of the cottage was occupied by rough carvings now quite worm-eaten, and behind them, when the doors were opened, were to be seen the cupboard-beds where generations of sailors had been born, had slept, and where their old mothers had died.

From the black rafters hung old kitchen utensils, bundles of herbs, wooden spoons, smoked beef, and also old fishing-nets which had been mouldering there since the last Moan sons were shipwrecked; so that Gaud’s bed, set in one corner, with its white muslin curtains, looked like a delicate bit of luxury brought into the hut of a Celt.

There was a photograph of Sylvestre in his sailor's uniform, in a frame hanging against the granite wall, over which his grandmother had hung his military medal, with a pair of red cloth anchors, such as sailors wear on their right sleeves, and which had been his. Gaud had also bought one of those mortuary crowns of black and white pearl beads, such as are put around the portraits of the dead in Brittany; and that was his little mausoleum, — all that they had to keep his memory sacred in his Breton home.

Gaud and Grandmother Moan went to bed early, to save the lights; but on summer evenings, when the weather was fine, they sat out for a few moments on a stone by the door, and watched the passers-by on the road, a little above their heads.

Then old Yvonne went to bed in her wooden cupboard, and Gaud in her own pretty bed, where, having worked hard and walked a long way, she fell asleep quite soon, and dreamed of the Icelanders, but like a good, brave girl, without troubling herself too much about them.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUT one day at Paimpol, hearing that the "Marie" had just arrived, Gaud felt herself seized with a kind of fever. All the calm with which she had awaited its return suddenly abandoned her.

She hurried through her work, without knowing why she did so, and started homeward earlier than usual; and as she hastened along the road, she recognized Yann at a distance coming toward her.

She trembled all over, and could scarcely stand. He was already quite near, coming along hardly twenty feet away from her, with his magnificent figure, and his curly locks under his fisher's cap. She was taken so unawares by this encounter that she really was afraid he would perceive that she was trembling, and she would have died with shame if he had. And then she felt sure that her hair was out of order, and that she looked tired, from having hurried with her work. She would have given anything to be able to hide under a furze-bush or disappear down some marten-hole.

And then he too started back a little, as if to try to go some other way. But it was too late; they would have to pass each other in the narrow path. He threw himself against the bank, to avoid touching her, shying like a restive horse, while he looked furtively at her.

She too for half a second lifted her eyes, which unconsciously revealed all her longing and her pain; and as their eyes met involuntarily for an instant, her violet pupils seemed to dilate, and under the influence of her deep and sudden emotion seemed almost to flash fire, while her face flushed to her temples under the roots of her golden hair.

As he touched his hat he said, "Good-day, Mademoiselle Gaud."

"Good-day, Monsieur Yann," she replied, and that was all; it was over. She went on her way, still trembling, but feeling the blood flowing naturally again, and her strength returning, the farther he departed.

At the cottage she found old Mother Moan in a corner, with her head in her hands, weeping and crying with her childish "hi, hi, hi!" her hair all undone, and escaping from her comb like a thin skein of gray hemp.

"Oh, my dear Gaud! I met young Gaos on the road to Plouhersel, just as I was coming back from gathering my sticks; and we talked about my grandson, as you may suppose. They only got back from Iceland this morning, and he had been to see me this afternoon while I was away. Poor boy! there were tears in his eyes too; and he insisted on coming all the way back with me, dear Gaud, to carry my little bundle of sticks."

Gaud listened to this, standing, while her heart grew heavier and heavier. So this visit of Yann on which she had counted for telling him so many things, was already paid, and probably never would be repeated. It was all over. And then the cottage seemed still more desolate, and poverty still harder to bear, and the world so empty that she bent her head and wished that she might die.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE winter came on little by little, like a slowly dropping winding-sheet, and cold gray days followed cold gray days ; but Yann did not appear again, and the two women lived quite deserted and alone.

With the cold of the winter living was more expensive, and it was harder to get along.

And then old Yvonne became very difficult to take care of ; she lost her temper easily, and said malicious and insulting things. The fit would take her once or twice a week like a child, and for no reason whatever. Poor old woman ! she was still so kind and sweet on her sensible days that Gaud did not cease to respect and care for her. How strange to have been always so good, and end by being so bad, — to reveal in her last hours a depth of malice which in all her life had never stirred, and a whole vocabulary of vulgar words which never before had been spoken ! What hidden mystery was here, what mockery of the soul !

She began to sing too ; and that was worse to listen to than her anger was to bear, — things which came back to her by chance, parts of the “ Oremus ” in the Mass, or more likely some vulgar couplets which she had heard the sailors singing on the quays long ago.

Sometimes she would drone out the "Fillettes de Paimpol," or very often, nodding her head and keeping time with her foot, she would strike up :

" Mon mari vient de partir ;
Pour la pêche d'Islande, mon mari vient de partir,
Il m'a laissée sans le sou ;
Mais, trala, trala, la lou !
J'en gagne !
J'en gagne ! "

And each time she would stop quite short, while her eyes would gaze wide open into vacancy, and then all look of life would fade out of them, like the dying flame which suddenly shoots up before it is finally extinguished. And then her head would drop, and she would remain in a stupid state for a long time, with her mouth open as if she was dead.

Besides all this, she did not always keep herself very clean nowadays, and that was a kind of trial which Gaud had not counted on.

One day she forgot her grandson. " Sylvestre, Sylvestre ? " she said to Gaud, as if trying to remember who Sylvestre could be. " Oh, Lord, my dear, you see I had so many when I was young, boys and girls, and girls and boys, that now, really, you know — "

And as she spoke, she threw out her poor wrinkled hand with a gesture which was almost vulgar.

And then the next day, on the contrary, she remembered him perfectly, relating a thousand lit-

the things that he had done or said, and weeping for him all day long.

Oh, those winter evenings ! — when they had no wood to *make* up the fire, when Gaud would sew on while she was almost freezing, to finish before she went to bed the work she brought home with her every evening.

Grandmother Yvonne, the while, would sit quietly in the chimney-corner, with her feet on the last dying embers, her hands folded under her apron. But she had to be talked to in the beginning of the evening.

“ You never have anything to tell me, my dear. Why not? In my time I knew many a girl of your age who knew how to talk ; and it seems to me we would not be so gloomy here, we two, if you would only say something nice once in a while.”

And then Gaud would relate whatever news she had heard in town, or would tell the old woman the names of the people she had met on the road, talking of things which were indifferent to herself, as in fact everything was now, stopping in the middle of her stories when she saw that the poor old woman had fallen asleep.

There was nothing joyous, nothing young about the girl whose blooming youth longed so for youth like to itself. Her beauty would *fade away* in solitude and neglect.

The sea-breeze which blew in at every crack made the flame of the lamp flicker ; and the sound

of the waves was heard there as plainly as if on board ship. With this sound was associated the sad thought of Yann which was always present to her, as the sea was his special domain ; and during the terrible nights of storm, when everything seemed let loose, and a mighty clamor reigned in the darkness outside, she thought of him with anguish.

Ever alone there with this sleeping old woman, Gaud sometimes was afraid, and peered into the dark corners, thinking of all those sailors, her ancestors, who had slept in those beds in the wall and had been lost at sea on nights like these, and whose spirits might return. She did not feel at all protected from these visits by the presence of the old woman who was already so nearly one of them. Suddenly she would tremble all over from head to foot, as she heard coming from out the chimney-corner a little thread of a voice, thin and weak as if issuing from under ground, and in a mocking tone which froze her blood. The voice sang, —

“ Pour la pêche d’Islande, mon mari vient de partir ;
Il m’a laissée sans le sou ;
Mais trala, trala, la lou ! ”

And then she felt that kind of terror one has in the presence of the insane.

The rain kept pouring, pouring, like the continual running of a fountain, trickling ceaselessly down the walls outside ; and from leaks in the old mossy roof drops kept falling through, always in

the same spot, ceaselessly, monotonously, with the same melancholy drip, drip, drip, making wet places on the floor of the cottage, which was composed of rocks and earth beaten in with gravel and shells. She felt the water all around. It seemed to envelop and shut one in; and as the wind tormented it, and lashed and blew it into mist, making the dark night blacker still, it seemed to isolate even more completely from one another the lonely scattered cottages of Ploubazlanec.

Sunday evenings were worse for Gaud than others, on account of the gayety that reigned elsewhere; there were happy little parties even in these lonely hamlets on the shore, when one or another of the little cottages, shut up and lashed by the black rain, was always lighted up, and rang with the sound of sailors' choruses.

Inside, tables were arranged for drinking, fishermen were drying themselves by the smoky fire, the old fellows contentedly sipping their brandy and water, the young ones courting the girls, and all getting drunk and singing loud enough to raise the roof. And near to them, the sea, which might be their grave to-morrow, was singing too, and filling the night with her mighty voice.

Sometimes on Sundays, companies of young men, coming out of the wine-shops, on returning from Paimpol would pass along the road near the door of the Moans' cottage, — those who lived at the other end of the district toward Pors-Even. They went by very late, caring little about getting

wet, being used to waves and storms. Gaud listened to their shouts and songs, which were quickly drowned in the sound of the gale or the surf, trying to make out Yann's voice, and trembling when she thought she recognized it.

It was unkind of Yann not to come to see them again, and to lead such a gay life so soon after Sylvestre's death; it was not like him. No; she certainly did not understand it. But in spite of everything she could not believe that he was quite heartless, and she could not forget him.

The fact was that since his return he had led a very dissipated life. In the first place, they had made the usual run down into the Gulf of Gasconne, which is always a time of pleasure for the Icelanders, — a time when they have a little money in their pockets to spend as they choose (a small advance which their captains make them on their share of the fishing, which is not payable until the winter).

They go down there every year to get salt among the islands; and he had taken up an old affair with a pretty dark girl of Saint-Martin-de-Pre, — a sweetheart of the autumn before. Together they wandered, during these last sunny days, among the purple vineyards, filled with the song of the larks, the perfume of ripe grapes, ocean pinks, and the sea odors from the beach; together they sang and danced during the moonlight evenings of the vintage in a gay and brief intoxication of love-making and new wine. And

then the " Marie " having gone into Bordeaux, he found again in a café chantant, all decorated with gold, the pretty singer who had given him the watch, and lazily let himself be adored for another week's time.

When he came back to Brittany in October, he had stood up at the weddings of several of his friends, always dressed in his holiday clothes, and had often been drunk, after midnight, at the end of the balls which followed. Every week he had some new adventure, which the girls took pains to relate to Gaud with exaggerated details.

Three or four times she had seen him at a distance coming toward her, but always in time to avoid him ; and he also at these times turned and took his way across the fields. By a silent understanding they avoided each other.

CHAPTER XV.

AT Paimpol there lived a fat woman called Madame Tressoleur. She kept a wine-shop which was most popular among the Icelanders, in one of the streets which leads to the harbor, where captains and ship-owners came to engage their crews, picking out the best of the sailors as they drank together.

She had been pretty once, and was still a great favorite with the fishermen, though now she had

a mustache, the manners of a man, and a very sharp tongue. She looked like a sutler with a big white muslin cap; and she was religious after her own fashion, having been born a Bretonne. She kept the names of all the sailors in the country in her head, as if they were written on a register; she knew those who were good and those who were useless, and kept the run of what they earned and what each one was worth.

One January day, having been sent for to make Madame Tressoleur a dress, Gaud went there to work in a room behind the saloon.

The entrance to Dame Tressoleur's shop was through a door with massive granite posts, which were set back under the first floor of the house, in an old-fashioned way; and when one opened the door there was always some gust blowing in from the street which slammed it to, and those who entered rushed in suddenly, as if cast up by the surf. The room was low and deep, white-washed, and adorned with pictures in gilt frames representing ships, sea-fights, and shipwrecks; and a china Virgin was set upon a bracket in a corner surrounded by artificial flowers.

These old walls had listened to the sound of many a sailor's ringing song, and had seen much boisterous gayety since the old days in Paimpol, from the exciting time of the pirates up to the present generation of Icelanders, who differ very little from their ancestors; and many a man's

life had been staked and the contracts signed on those oaken tables in intervals of drunkenness.

While she sewed on the dress, Gaud listened to the conversation which was going on, on the other side of the partition, between Dame Tressoleur and two retired sailors who were sitting there drinking.

These old salts were discussing a certain beautiful new boat which was just being fitted out in port. She would never be ready in time for the next season, this "Leopoldine."

"Oh, yes," replied the hostess, "she will ; she'll be ready sure enough. I can tell you all about it, for her crew was picked out here yesterday, — all the men of Guermeur's old 'Marie,' which they are going to sell to be broken up. Five young fellows were engaged just over there, before my eyes, at that table. And they signed with my pen, — so ; and five fine fellows they are, I can tell you, — Laumec, Tugdual Caroff, Yvon Duff, young Keraëz of Tréguier, and that great Yann Gaos, who's worth any three of them."

The "Leopoldine" — that name which she had just caught, of the boat which was to carry Yann away — struck into Gaud's memory as if it had been ineffaceably stamped there with the blow of a hammer. And that evening, when she was back at Ploubazlanec, seated by the little lamp finishing her work, the name kept running in her head, and its very sound seemed to have something foreboding in it. —

The names of persons and also those of ships have a look and almost a character of their own ; and the “ Leopoldine ” — name new and unfamiliar to her, — haunted her with an almost unnatural persistency, becoming a sort of gloomy obsession. No ; she had expected to see Yann going off again on the “ Marie,” which she had once visited and knew all about, and whose Virgin had protected it during long years of dangerous voyages. And so this change to a new boat, this “ Leopoldine,” made her the more apprehensive. But soon she began to say to herself that it made no difference to her, and that nothing which concerned him could ever affect her again ; and indeed, what could it matter to her whether he was on this ship or another, here or elsewhere ? Was she more unhappy, or less, when he was in Iceland, and summer reigned again over the deserted cottages and these lonely, restless women, or when a new autumn came bringing the fishermen back again once more ? It was all indifferent to her, — all equally without hope or joy. There was no longer any bond between them, or anything to bring them together, since he had even forgotten all about poor little Sylvestre. She must make up her mind that the one dream, the one desire of her life, was over forever ; she must forget Yann and everything which concerned him, even this name of Iceland, which had such a melancholy charm for her ears on his account. She must drive away these thoughts, banish them

completely, and tell herself it was finished, done with forever.

She looked tenderly at the poor old woman as she lay asleep ; she still had need of her, but she could not live much longer. And afterward, what use would it be for her to work, or even try to live ?

The west wind was rising outside ; and mingling with the sound of its distant sobbing, could be heard the quiet dropping of the rain from the roof.

And then Gaud's tears began to fall as she thought of her deserted state, — without father or mother, or any one to care for her, — flowing over her lips with a bitter taste, dropping silently on her work like a quiet summer rain which falls quickly and heavily from the overcharged clouds. And then, as she could see to work no longer, she folded up Dame Tressoleur's ample corsage and tried to go to sleep, shivering as she threw herself into her poor, pretty bed ; for it too was getting damper and colder every day, like everything else in the cottage. But as she was very young, even with all her tears she finally became warm and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVI. ✓

SEVERAL dull weeks went by. It was already February ; and the weather was quite fair and mild.

Yann was just coming out of the ship-broker's, where he had received his share of the last season's fishing, amounting to fifteen hundred francs, which he was taking to his mother, according to the custom of the family. The year had been a good one ; and he was going home satisfied.

Near Ploubazlanec he saw a group gathered at the edge of the road, — an old woman shaking her stick, and around her a crowd of mischievous little street-boys, making fun of her. It was Grandmother Moan, the dear grandmother whom Sylvestre had so loved, — all ragged and torn, and become one of those poverty-stricken old imbeciles whom the children run after in the street ; and it made him feel terribly.

The ragamuffins of Ploubazlanec had killed her cat ; and she was shaking her stick at them in anger and despair.

“ Oh, if my poor boy had only been here, you never would have dared to do it, you little scoundrels ! ”

She had fallen, it appeared, as she ran after them ; her cap was all on one side ; her dress was

covered with mud ; and they were saying again that she was drunk, which often happens in Brittany to unfortunate old women such as she.

Yann knew very well that it was not true, and that she had always been a respectable old woman, and never drank anything but water.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourselves,” he said angrily to the urchins, in a voice and tone which frightened them.

And quick as a wink they took to their heels, ashamed and scared before the “Great Gaos.” Gaud, who was just returning from Paimpol, carrying her work for the evening, had seen from a distance that something was the matter, and came running up to find out what had happened to her grandmother, and what anybody could be doing to her, understanding it all when she saw her cat, which they had killed.

She lifted her clear eyes to Yann, who did not turn his away. They did not think of avoiding each other this time ; they only blushed very red, both of them, he as quickly as she, with the same flushing cheeks, and looked at each other a little startled at being so near together, but with no ill feeling, almost affectionately, united as they were in one common impulse of pity and protection.

The school-children had long been looking out for a chance to kill the poor cat, because it had a black face and looked like an imp, although it was in fact a very good cat, which, if you regarded it closely, was really quite good-natured and playful.

They had stoned it to death, and it was a pitiable sight to behold. The poor old woman, still mumbling out her threats, started off, all shaken and tottering, carrying her cat by the tail, like a rabbit.

“Oh, my poor boy, my poor boy ! if he were only alive, they’d never dare to treat me so, — no, never !”

Her tears ran down the wrinkles of her poor old face, and her hands, with their big blue veins, trembled with excitement.

Gaud stopped in the middle of the road to arrange the old woman’s cap, and tried to comfort and console her.

Yann was very indignant. How could children be so wicked as to treat a poor old woman so ? The tears almost filled his own eyes for pity. Not for the cat, of course, for men of his kind rather like to torment animals, and have no sensibility for their sufferings ; but his heart was filled with sympathy as he walked along behind the poor childish old woman, carrying her cat by the tail. He thought of Sylvestre, whom he had really loved so dearly, and of his grief if he could only have foreseen that she would end her days thus in wretchedness and derision.

Gaud apologized for her as if she were responsible for her appearance.

“It’s because she has fallen that she is so dirty,” she said in a low voice. “Her dress is no longer very new, it’s true, for we are not rich, Monsieur Yann ; but I mended it myself yesterday,

and when I left her this morning I saw that she was clean and in order."

He looked long at her, much more touched, perhaps, by this simple little explanation than he could have been by glib phrases, tears, or reproaches. They went on walking side by side as they neared the Moans' cottage. He knew very well that there never had been anybody so pretty as she ; but it seemed to him that her poverty and her mourning had made her more beautiful than ever. Her manner was graver, and her violet eyes still more reserved, and yet they seemed to look into one's very soul. Her figure too was still more perfectly developed ; she would soon be twenty-three, and was in the full bloom of her beauty. And then she was dressed now more like the daughter of a fisherman, with her simple black gown and her little cap. And that distinguished air she had, he could not tell where it came from ; it was something innate and unconscious, with which he could no longer reproach her. Perhaps her dress, a little more carefully arranged than that of others, and defining her beautiful arms and shoulders, made the difference. But no, it was more in her look and in her quiet voice.

CHAPTER XVII.

YANN was really going along with them, — possibly all the way to their home.

They all three walked along together; and it began to look comical to see them passing solemnly along, like the funeral cortége of the cat. The people at the doors smiled as they saw them. In the middle marched old Yvonne, carrying the cat, Gaud at her right, blushing and excited, and the great Yann on the left, walking along thoughtfully, with his head in the air. But the poor old woman had suddenly calmed down on the way. Now that her cap was set straight, she felt more like herself; and without speaking, she began to look first at one and then at the other out of the corner of her eye, which had become quite clear again.

Gaud said nothing more, for fear of giving Yann an opportunity of taking his leave. She would have wished to dwell on the memory of that pleasant look he had given her, to walk along with eyes closed to everything else, to walk thus at his side forever, lost in a dream; instead of which, they would reach their lonely, desolate home all too soon, and then it would be over forever.

At the door there was one of those moments of indecision during which the heart seems to

stop beating. First Grandmother Yvonne walked in, without turning her head ; then Gaud followed her hesitatingly ; then Yann came in also.

He was under their roof for the first time in his life, — without any particular reason, probably ; for what reason could he have ? As he crossed the threshold, he touched his hat, and as his eyes fell on the portrait of Sylvestre, with its little mourning wreath of black pearls, he went slowly up to it, as if approaching a tomb.

Gaud remained standing, resting her hands on the table ; and as Yann began to look around, her eyes followed his as he silently noticed their poor surroundings. And in spite of its clean and respectable appearance, this place, where the two deserted women had taken shelter together, was poor indeed.

Perhaps he might feel a little kindly pity for her at least, to see her brought almost to want in this time-worn, granite hut. There was nothing left of her past riches but the pretty white bed, and Yann's eyes involuntarily turned to it.

He did not speak ; what was he staying for ? The old grandmother, who was still sharp enough in her lucid moments, pretended not to notice him ; and so they stood there, facing each other, mute and anxious, finally gazing into each other's eyes as if to ask some momentous question. But the moments passed ; and as each instant fled, their silence grew more and more constrained. And still more deeply and earnestly

did they regard each other, as if in solemn waiting for something unspeakable which tarried long in coming.

“Gaud,” said he, in a low, earnest voice, “if you are still willing —” What was he going to say? Had he made up his mind suddenly, as usual, and as he stood there taken some great resolution which he hardly dared express?

“If you are still willing — The fish have sold well this season, and I have a little money ahead —”

If she was still willing? What was he asking of her? Had she heard aright? She was struck dumb by all she felt his words implied.

And old Yvonne, over in her corner, listened, for she thought she heard happiness draw nigh.

“We might get married, Mademoiselle Gaud, if you are still willing.”

And then he waited for her reply, which came not. What was preventing her from uttering that “Yes”? He was surprised and anxious, and she saw it. Leaning with her two hands on the table, she had turned perfectly white, and spoke not, and with her drooping eyes looked lovely, but almost fainting.

“Well, Gaud, why don’t you answer?” said the old woman, who had risen and came toward them. “You see, Monsieur Yann, it has surprised her. You must excuse her; she will think about it, and answer you by and by. Sit down,

Monsieur Yann, and take a glass of cider with us."

But no; Gaud could not reply. No words would come to her in her rapture. It was true, then, that he was good, and that he did have a heart. She had found him again,—her real Yann such as she never had ceased to believe him, in spite of his relentlessness, his rude refusal, in spite of everything. Long time he had disdained her; now he accepted her,—now that she was poor, that was doubtless his idea. He had had some notion which she would know of by and by. At this moment she did not think of calling him to account, or of reproaching him, for her two years of unhappiness. And besides, it was lost and forgotten in an instant, in the delicious whirlwind of emotion which swept over her life. She still spoke no word, only telling him her adoration with her swimming eyes, which looked deep into his, while the great tears began to fall down her cheeks.

"So! God bless you, my children!" said Grandmother Moan; "and I am very grateful to him, for now I am glad that I have lived to be so old, to have seen this before I die."

There they stood, still facing each other, with clasped hands, finding no words with which to speak to each other,—knowing nothing sweet enough, no phrase to express their feelings, none which they deemed worthy to break that exquisite silence.

“ Kiss each other, at least, my children. Why ! they don't say a word. Dear me ! what queer children I have, to be sure ! Come, Gaud, say something to him, my dear. In my time, it seemed to me, we kissed each other when we were engaged.”

Yann took off his cap, as if seized with some unaccustomed feeling of respect, before bending to kiss Gaud ; and it seemed to him that it was the first real kiss he ever had given in his life. She also kissed him, with all her heart, pressing her fresh young lips to the sun-tanned cheek of her lover. And from between the stones of the wall the cricket chirped up its merry song of happiness, and this time, by chance, it was right. And the poor little picture of Sylvestre seemed to smile on them from out its mourning wreath. Everything seemed to be suddenly revived and rejuvenated in the lifeless cottage. The silence was filled with unuttered music ; even the pale winter's twilight which fell in through the window seemed like some magic light.

“ So it will be after he gets back from Iceland, I suppose, dear children.”

Gaud bent her head. Iceland, the “ Leopoldine,” she had forgotten those terrors in her way. “ Gets back from Iceland ! ” Oh, how long it would seem, — one more whole summer of anxious waiting !

And Yann, tapping the ground rapidly with his

foot, seemed suddenly to be in a great hurry too, and was counting up very fast, to see if by hastening things along there would not be time for them to get married before he left. So many days to get out the papers, so many days for publishing the banns in church. Yes, that would only bring them up to the 20th or 25th for the wedding, and then, if nothing interfered, there still would be one whole week for them to be together.

“The first thing I must do is to go and tell my father,” he said with as much haste as if the very moments of their lives had become measured and precious.





PART IV.

CHAPTER I.



IN the Breton country lovers always like to sit outdoors at night-fall on the benches by the cottage doors.

Yann and Gaud followed this custom too, and every night at the door of the Moan cottage on an old granite bench they sat together making love.

Others have the springtime, the shadows of the trees, mild evenings, and flowering roses. They had nothing but these February twilights falling over a sea-girt land of rocks and furze. No green branches waved above and around them; there was naught but the mighty heavens filled with floating mists, and for flowers, brown seaweeds which the fishermen dragged up over the path as they brought their nets up from the beach.

The winters are not severe in this part of the world, which is warmed by the Gulf Stream, but still the twilights were very often damp and chilly,

and an imperceptible moisture gathered upon their shoulders.

They lingered there nevertheless, being quite content ; and the old bench, which had seen a century pass by, was not astonished at this love-making, having seen many another like it. From generation to generation it had heard the same sweet words from the lips of the young, and had seen these same lovers returning later, tottering old men and women, to sit in this same place, but always in the daytime, to catch a breath of air, and warm themselves in their last sunshine. Once in a while Grandmother Moan would put her head out of the window to have a look at them, not because she was curious, but out of affection, just for the pleasure of seeing them, and also to try to persuade them to come in. She would say, "You will catch cold, my dear children, and be ill. Dear sakes ! I'd just like to know if you think it's sensible, staying out so late?"

Cold ! were they cold ? Did they feel anything beyond the happiness of being together ? People passing along the road at evening heard the slight murmur of two voices, mingled with the sound of the waves at the foot of the cliffs below.

Gaud's clear voice alternating with Yann's, which had sweet and caressing tones in its lower notes, made very harmonious music. They could see also their two silhouettes thrown out against the granite wall behind them ; first the white of Gaud's

cap, and then all her slender figure in her black gown, and beside her the great square shoulders of her lover.

Above them rose the dwarfed roof of the cottage, and back of all was the dim twilight and the colorless emptiness of sea and sky.

They finally came in, however, and sat down in the chimney-place, where old Yvonne, fast asleep, with her head fallen over on her breast, did not disturb them much. They began to talk together in a low voice, for they had two years of silence to make up for, and must make haste with their courtship, as it was to be so brief.

They had arranged to live with Grandmother Yvonne, who had left them the cottage in her will, and for the present were compelled to put off their project of improving and beautifying this poor nest of theirs until Yann's return from Iceland.

CHAPTER II.

THE lovers were amusing themselves one evening, telling over the thousand little things that she had done, or that had happened to him since their first meeting ; and he spoke of the dresses she had worn, and different fêtes she had been to. She listened to him in amazement. How could he have known all that? Who would have imagined

that he would notice such things or remember them? And he, smiling, put on a mysterious air, and related still further little details, — things which she herself had almost forgotten.

Now she listened without interrupting him, in the sudden rapture which had taken complete possession of her, beginning to understand what it all meant. He had loved her all that time himself! She had been his constant thought, and he was now innocently confessing it to her. So what could have been the matter? Why had he so neglected her, and made her suffer so?

This mystery, which he had promised to explain to her, was always there; but he always had avoided the explanation with an embarrassed manner and a little enigmatical smile.

CHAPTER III.

THEY went to Paimpol, one pleasant day, with Grandmother Yvonne, to buy the wedding dress.

Among the pretty gowns which Gaud had had before, there were several which could have well been arranged for the occasion, without any necessity of buying another. But Yann wanted to make her a present of it; and she had not tried too much to prevent him, for he thought that for her to have a dress which he had given

her, bought and paid for with the money he had earned by fishing, would make her seem already a little like his wife.

They determined upon a black dress, — as Gaud was not yet out of mourning for her father. But Yann did not find anything pretty enough among the stuffs spread out before him. He was a little haughty with the shopkeepers; and he whom nothing ever had induced to go into the shops of Paimpol before was now interested in everything, even in the way the dress was to be made, and wanted deep bands of velvet put on it to make it still more beautiful.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE evening, as Yann and Gaud were sitting on their stone bench, in the solitude of the cliff, under the gathering twilight, their eyes fell by chance on a thorn-bush — the only one around — which was growing between the rocks by the side of the road. In the half light, it seemed to them that they could see little white buds on it. “It looks as if it were in flower,” said Yann.

And they went up to make sure. And in fact, it was all in blossom. Not being able to see very clearly, they felt it with their fingers, to make sure of the presence of the wee flowers,

which were all damp with the mist. And then came the first early feeling of the spring; and at the same time it struck them that the days had become longer, that the air was milder, and the nights less dark.

But how far in advance this bush was! nowhere in the country on any roadside was there another like it. No doubt it had bloomed expressly for them, for their love's holiday.

"Come, we must pick some of the flowers," said Yann. And fumbling about in the dark, he made up a bouquet with his great hands, carefully cutting off the thorns with his big fisher's knife, which he carried in his belt, and then he fastened it on Gaud's dress.

"There! You look just like a bride," he said, stepping back to see how it became her, notwithstanding the darkness.

Below them, the calm sea rippled quietly over the pebbles on the beach, with a little intermittent sound, like the regular breathing of one asleep. She seemed indifferent, or even favorable, to this courtship which was going on so near her.

The days seemed long to them while waiting for the evenings; and then, when they separated on the stroke of ten, they were a little sad because the evenings were so soon ended.

They had to hurry about the marriage papers, and everything else, for fear of not being ready in time, and so letting their happiness escape them till the autumn, in the uncertain future.

This courtship of theirs, carried on at night in this melancholy spot, to the continual sound of the sea, and with an almost feverish thought of the flight of time, came to have a strange and almost solemn character.

They were different from other lovers, graver and less tranquil in their love.

He would never tell her what he had had against her all these two years ; and after he had left her in the evening the mystery tormented her. Still, he loved her dearly ; she was sure of that.

It was true that he had loved her from the first, but not as he did now. It seemed to have filled his heart and mind ever fuller and fuller, like the tide which rises higher and higher until it covers everything. He had never known before what it was to love anybody in that way. Once in a while he would throw himself almost at full length along the bench beside Gaud, putting his head on her knees like a child, to be caressed, and then he would get up again very quickly, for propriety's sake. And he loved to throw himself on the ground at her feet, lying there quietly with his head on the edge of her dress. He adored that sacred something about her which was her soul, which showed itself in the pure and tranquil sound of her voice, in the expression of her smile, and in her beautiful clear gaze.

CHAPTER V.

ONE rainy evening Yann and Gaud were sitting side by side in the chimney-corner, Grandmother Yvonne opposite them asleep. The dancing flames of the wood-fire threw great shadows of them up and down, across the blackened ceiling.

They were speaking very low, as lovers do; but this evening there were long embarrassed pauses in their conversation. Yann particularly said almost nothing, but hung his head, half smiling, trying to avoid Gaud's eyes.

It was because she had been plying him all the evening with questions about this mystery which he could not be made to explain; and this time he found himself in close quarters. She was too bright and too determined to find out all about it; no pretext would avail him this time.

"Did you hear unkind things said about me?" she asked.

He tried to reply, "Yes." Unkind things? Oh, yes! he had heard plenty of things said about her in Paimpol and in Ploubazlanec.

She asked "What?" He was embarrassed and did not know what to say, and then she knew directly that it must be something else.

"Was it the way I dressed, Yann?"

Yes, that had had something to do with it; she was too well dressed at one time for the wife

of a simple fisherman. But finally he had to confess that it was not that either.

“Was it because at one time we were considered to be rich? You were afraid of being refused?”

“Oh, no, not that.”

He made this reply with such an innocent confidence in himself that Gaud was amused; and then there was another pause, during which the sobbing sound of the wind and the waves could be heard outside.

And while she looked earnestly at him an idea slowly dawned upon her, and her expression began to change.

“It was nothing of that kind, Yann; then what was it?” she said, suddenly looking him straight in the eyes with an irresistible smile, as if she had found out what it was.

And then he turned away his head and laughed. So it was this, — she had found it out! — he could give her no reason, because he had none and never had had any. It was simply because he had made up his mind that he would not (as Sylvestre had formerly told her), that was all. And then they had teased him about this Gaud. Everybody — his parents, Sylvestre, his mates, even Gaud herself — had tried to persuade him to it.

He had begun by saying No, — obstinately, No, but always keeping in the bottom of his heart the idea that some day when nobody was expecting

it, it would certainly end by being Yes. And it was on account of this childishness of her Yann that Gaud had pined away in loneliness two long years, and had longed that she might die.

After the first impulse, which was to laugh a little in the confusion of being caught, Yann looked at Gaud with serious honest eyes, which in their turn were earnestly questioning her. If she would only forgive him ! he was so very sorry now, that he had caused her so much pain, and would she pardon him ?

“It’s my way, Gaud,” said he ; “at home, with my parents, it’s the same thing. Sometimes when I get an obstinate fit, I stay angry with them a whole week, hardly speaking a word to anybody. But I love them just the same ; and I always end by doing just what they want, as if I were a child of ten. If you only knew what an idea it had been of mine, not to marry. But it could not have lasted very long any way, Gaud, I assure you.”

If she would only forgive him ! She felt the loving tears come into her eyes, and the last remnant of her old grief vanished with this confession. And besides, without all that former suffering the present would not have been so joyful ; and now that it was over, she was almost glad to have had that time of trial. Now everything was cleared up between them, in an unexpected way, it was true, but completely ; there was no longer any cloud between their two souls. He drew her

into his arms, and they rested so, their heads together and her cheek laid on his, having no need to explain anything more or to say another word.

CHAPTER VI.

It was yet six days before the fishermen were to set sail for Iceland. The wedding procession was returning from the church of Ploubazlanec, blown about by a furious wind, under a black and lowering sky.

They were very handsome, both of them, walking along arm in arm, like sovereigns, at the head of their procession, as if lost in a dream. Calm, reserved, and grave, they seemed to see nothing about them and to be exalted above this mundane sphere. And it seemed as if even the wind respected them, for all behind them the cortège was one merry disorder of laughing couples, blown about by the great gusts from the west.

There were many young persons among them for whom life was just beginning; and some were already gray, but they smiled nevertheless, as they remembered their own weddings and their early years.

Grandmother Yvonne was there, following along, very much out of breath, but almost happy, on the arm of an old uncle of Yann, who was mak-

ing gallant, old-fashioned speeches to her. She wore a beautiful new cap which they had bought her for the occasion, and the same little shawl, — dyed again for the third time, — black now on account of Sylvestre.

And the wind without distinction buffeted all these invited guests; and petticoats were lifted, and dresses blown about, and hats and bonnets flew off in the gusts.

At the door of the church the bride and bridegroom had bought, according to the custom, little bouquets of artificial flowers to complete their costume. Yann had pinned his carelessly upon his broad chest; but he was one of those people who can wear anything. As for Gaud, however, there was an air of distinction even in the way these poor, coarse flowers were arranged upon her beautifully fitting gown, which was made, as in former days, so as to set off her exquisite figure.

The fiddler, who was leading the procession, exasperated by the wind, was playing recklessly; and his tunes, coming to the ears in gusts amid the noise of this mighty gale, seemed a droll little music, shriller than the cry of a sea-gull.

All Ploubazlanec had come out to see them. This marriage was a thing everybody was deeply interested in, and came from all the country around to see.

At the crossways there were groups of people waiting to see them pass. Almost all the Icelanders, friends of Yann, were stationed there.

They saluted the bride and bridegroom as they went by, and Gaud replied with a slight inclination of her head, with the quiet grace of a young lady; and she was admired all along the route.

All the hamlets round about, even the most wretched and remote, including those in the forests of the back country, were emptied of their maimed and lame, the simple and the insane.

All these were stationed along the roadside, playing on accordions and hurdy-gurdies, and holding out their hands, their bowls, or their caps to receive the alms which Yann threw to them with a grand and generous air, and Gaud with a gracious smile like a queen. There were some very old beggars among them, with white hair covering their empty heads; and as they crouched in the hollows of the road, they looked of the same color as that earth from which they seemed never to have quite emerged, and into which they would so soon return, without ever having known a thought. Their wandering eyes disturbed one like the mystery of their useless and abortive lives, as they looked on, without understanding, at this festival of full and magnificent life which was passing by.

They went on past the hamlet of Pors-Even and the Gaos' house, for they were going, as was the custom of newly wedded people in Ploubazlanec, to the Chapel of the Trinity, which is situated, as it were, at the very end of the Breton

country. At the foot of the last and most extreme point of the cliffs the chapel stands on a pedestal of low rocks, very near to the water, as if it already belonged to the sea. To get down to it they had to take a goat-path winding down among great blocks of granite ; and the wedding procession spread out over the slope of this lonely cape among the rocks, their merry and gallant speeches being lost in the noise of wind and waves.

It was impossible to reach the chapel. In such stormy weather the sea with its great breakers came up too far for them to venture, and they could see the white crests dashing up high and covering the path as they fell.

Yann, who went ahead, with Gaud leaning on his arm, drew back first before the raging water. Behind him, the procession, scattered among the rocks, which were here cut out like an amphitheatre, stopped short ; and it seemed as if he had come to present his wife to the sea, which seemed to receive the bride with an angry face. As he turned around, he saw the fiddler perched up on a gray rock trying to grind out the tune of a country dance between the blasts.

“ Put up your music, my friend,” he said to him ; “ the sea is getting ahead of you.”

At the same time a heavy driving rain, which had been holding off since morning, began to pour down ; and that was the signal for a great rush, as with shouts of laughter they scrambled up the high cliff and fled into the Gaos' house.

CHAPTER VII.

THE wedding feast was held at the house of Yann's parents, because Gaud's cottage was so poor and so small.

In the big new room upstairs, a table was set for twenty-five people, who were to sit down with the happy pair, — brothers and sisters, Cousin Gaos the pilot, Guermeur, Keraëz, Yvon Duff, all the crew of the old "Marie," who were now on the "Leopoldine," four very pretty bride's-maids, with their hair wound in coils over their ears like the ancient Byzantine empresses, and caps made in the new fashion for young girls, like a sea-shell; four groomsmen, too, all of them Icelanders, fine-looking fellows with bright handsome eyes.

Below, of course, there was eating and cooking going on. The whole procession was gathered there quite in confusion; and the women who had been hired at Paimpol to help at the feast quite lost their heads before the great chimney-place, filled up with skillets and boilers. Yann's parents would have liked a richer woman for their son, of course. But Gaud was now thought a good and brave young woman, and then to offset her lost fortune, she was the most beautiful

girl in the country ; and it pleased them to see the husband and wife so well matched.

And the old father said jokingly over his soup, "We'll have more Gaoses than ever now, and there was certainly no lack of them in Paimpol before." And counting on his fingers, he explained to an uncle of the bride how many there were of that name. His father, who was the youngest of nine brothers, had had twelve children, who had all married relatives, and that had made a lot of Gaoses, in spite of those who had been lost in Iceland.

"And I also," he said, "married a Gaos, and we two have had fourteen."

And at the thought of this colony, he laughed and shook his head.

Lord ! he had had enough trouble to bring them up, his fourteen little Gaoses ; but things were clearing up now, and then, besides, the ten thousand francs from the wreck had made them really very comfortable.

Very gayly too, Neighbor Guerneur related his adventures during his military service, — stories of China, the Antilles, and Brazil, which made the young men who were to go there some day open their eyes.

One of his best stories was about a time on board the "Iphigenie," when they were filling the casks with wine in the evening just at dusk, and the funnel through which it was poured in sprung a leak ; and then, instead of telling of it, they be-

gan to drink at the hole, and they kept it up two hours, until they could hold no more, and finally the whole gun-deck was flooded, for everybody was drunk.

And then the old salts who were sitting at the table laughed their merry boyish laugh and said with a touch of mischief, "There is a great deal of talk against the service, but it's only there that you get such a chance as that."

Out of doors, the weather was getting no better ; on the contrary, the wind and the rain were fairly raging in the black darkness. In spite of all the precautions which had been taken, there were some who got nervous about their boats anchored in the harbor, and began to talk about going off to see about them. Notwithstanding this, there was another sound, much pleasanter to hear, which came up from below, where the young ones of the party were taking supper together, — shouts of joy and laughter from little boys and girls, all cousins of Yann, who were beginning to get very merry over the cider.

They had boiled and roasted meats for supper, chickens, all kinds of fish, omelets and pancakes. They talked about fishing and smuggling, and discussed all sorts of ways for tricking the coast-guard^s-men, who, as everybody knows, are the born enemies of fishermen.

Upstairs, at the table of honor, they began to tell funny tales ; and a fire of stories flew about in Breton dialect, among these men, who had all sailed

around the world in their time. And then all of a sudden one of Yann's little brothers, with rosy face and bright eyes, a future Icelfander, became very ill from having drunk too much cider, and had to be taken out very quickly indeed. This interrupted the talk ; and as the wind was blowing now decidedly too hard, some of them broke off their stories in the middle and started off to look after their boats. The wind howled in the chimney like the tortured souls of the damned, and every now and then with terrific force shook the whole house on its stone foundations.

"It seems as if it was angry because we are amusing ourselves," said their cousin the pilot.

"No, it's the sea who is angry," replied Yann, looking at Gaud, "because I promised to marry her."

These two sat together, hand in hand, lost in a dreamy languor, whispering low, as if alone in the midst of all this gayety. And sometimes too Yann was sad, at the thought of Sylvestre ; it had been arranged that there should be no dancing on his account and because of Gaud's father. They had reached dessert ; and pretty soon the songs would begin. But first, there were prayers to be said for those of the family who were dead. At these wedding feasts this religious duty is never omitted ; and when Father Gæ's was seen rising from his seat and uncovering his white head, a silence fell on all. "This," he said, "is for Guillaume Gaos, my father." And

making the sign of the cross, he began the Latin prayer : —

“Pater noster qui es in cœlis, sanctificetur nomen tuum.”

The silence of a church now fell on all in the house, even over the merry tables of the children, and all under the roof were repeating in spirit the same eternal words.

“This is for Yves and Jean Gaos, my brothers, lost in the Iceland sea ; this is for Pierre Gaos, my son, wrecked with the ‘Zelis.’” And then, when all the Gaoses had been prayed for, he turned toward Grandmother Moan and said, “This is for Sylvestre Moan.” And he recited another prayer, while Yann’s tears fell.

“Sed libera nos a malo. Amen.”

And then the songs began, — songs learned at service in the forecastle, where there are always, as every one knows, plenty of very fine singers.

“Un noble corps, pas moins, que celui de zouaves ;
Mais chez nous les braves
Narguent le destin,
Hurrah ! hurrah ! vive le vrai marin ! ”

The couplets were recited by one of the grooms-men in a rhythmic way which was very taking, and then a lot of good voices took up the chorus.

But the wedded pair heard all this only as if it came from a distance, and spoke lower and lower to each other, as they still sat hand in hand ; and

Gaud often bent her head with a look of love and fear in her beautiful eyes.

And now their cousin the pilot was going around the table, serving a certain special wine of his own, which he had brought over with numberless precautions, holding the bottle carefully in a horizontal position, as he said it must not be shaken up ; and then he told its history.

One day while he was fishing, he saw a hogs-head floating alone out at sea ; it was impossible to tow it in, as it was too large. So they broke into it as it lay in the water, and filled every jug and pan they had on board with the wine. Even then they could not empty it ; so they signalled to the other pilots and fishermen, and all the sails in sight gathered around the find.

“ And there was more than one who was tipsy, I can tell you, when we got home that evening to Pors-Even.”

Outside, the wind still kept up its frightful uproar.

Downstairs the children were dancing round dances and jigs. Some of the smallest ones, nearly all of them little Gaoses, had indeed been put to bed ; but the others were making a great noise, led by little Fantec¹ and the small Laumec,² who were wanting actually to run and jump outdoors, and opening the door every moment, let in furious blasts which blew out the candles.

¹ Breton for Francis.

² Breton for William.

The pilot went on to finish the story of the wine. He had had forty bottles for his share, and he begged them to be sure not to speak of it, for fear of Monsieur le Commissaire of the department, who might make trouble for him because he had not made a declaration of the wreck. "And I can tell you," he went on, "he would have taken good care of these bottles ; for if we could have drawn them off clear, it would have been a capital good wine, for there's more of the real juice of the grape in it than in all the cellars of all the wine-shops in Paimpol."

Who knows where it had come from, this shipwrecked wine? It was strong, high-colored, very much mixed with sea-water, and still retained a sharp, salty taste. It was nevertheless found very good, and several bottles of it were emptied. And then their heads began to turn a little ; their voices got a little thick ; and the boys began to kiss the girls.

The singing went on gayly ; but there was very little more comfortable enjoyment of the feast, and the men looked anxiously at one another, on account of the storm which was rising all the time. The wind was howling outside worse than ever ; it was now one single, continuous roar, swelling threateningly louder and louder, as if uttered by the open throats of thousands of enraged beasts.

It seemed also as if one heard the heavy boom of great guns in the distance ; that was the sea

which was beating all along the coast of Plou-bazlanec. No, she certainly did not seem content; and Gaud felt frightened at this terrific music, which no one had commanded to play at their wedding.

About midnight, during a lull in the storm, Yann rose quietly, and made a sign to his wife to come and speak to him.

It was time for them to go home, he said. She blushed, and was confused to find that she had risen, and replied that it would be impolite to go away and leave the guests.

"No," replied Yann; "Father gives us permission; we can go."

He drew her after him, and they quietly made their escape.

And then they found themselves outside in the cold, in the furious gale, and the deep and stormy night; and hand in hand they started to run. From the heights of the cliff-path they felt rather than saw the mighty raging sea, whence all this clamor arose. And as they ran, bent over against the gale, the rain cutting them full in their faces, they were sometimes obliged to turn around and cover their mouths with their hands, to get back their breath, blown away by the wind.

First he took her by the waist, almost carrying her, to keep her from dragging her dress and spoiling her pretty slippers in the water which was streaming over the ground, and then he lifted

her right up on his shoulders, and went on running faster than ever.


No, he had not believed that he could love her so. And to think that she was twenty-two and he nearly twenty-eight, and that they might have been married and as happy as they were to-night for at least two years !

Finally they arrived at home, at their poor little cottage, with its damp floor and its thatched and mossy roof ; and they lit a candle which was twice blown out by the wind.

Old Grandmother Moan, who had been taken home before the singing began, had been in bed for the last two hours in her cupboard with the doors shut. They went up quietly, and looked at her through the crack of the door, to bid her good-night if by chance she was awake. But they saw that the old face was quiet and her eyes shut, and that she was asleep, or pretended to be, so as not to disturb them. And then they felt themselves alone together.

And they trembled as they clasped each other's hands. He bent over to kiss her lips, and Gaud turned her face and pressed her lips to Yann's cheek, which was quite cold from the wind.

The cottage was very low and very poor, and it was very cold. Ah, if Gaud had only remained rich as she once had been, what pleasure she would have had in arranging a pretty room, far different from this one, with its bare earthen floor ! She was hardly yet accustomed to these



rude granite walls, and to the rough look of everything; but her Yann was there with her, and all was changed and transfigured by his presence. She had no consciousness of anything but him.

And now their lips had met, and she no longer turned away her own. Clasped tight in each other's arms, they stood mute and lost in the ecstasy of that long kiss, being unable to disengage their clinging arms, knowing nothing, desiring nothing, more than that embrace.

Finally she freed herself in sudden confusion and said, —

“No, Yann, Grandmother Yvonne might see us!”

But he, with a smile, again sought the lips of his wife, and quickly, though still without leaving that exquisite mouth, put his arm out behind him, and with the back of his hand, put out the light.

Around and about them on this their wedding night, the same invisible orchestra still played on.

Hou, hou! hou, hou! The wind now uttered its cavernous roar with trembling rage, and then again repeated its menace close to their ears, as if with a refinement of malice, with little shrill sounds, like the piercing shriek of an owl. And there was the great tomb of sailors near at hand, rolling, devouring, and beating against the cliffs with its dull, heavy blows; and one night or another, he would be there struggling with the frenzy of its black and icy waters, and they knew

it. What did it matter? for the moment they were on land, sheltered from all this futile rage which only turned upon itself, and in the poor dark cottage, through which the wind was whistling, they gave themselves to each other, without a thought of danger or of death, spell-bound and intoxicated by the eternal magic of love.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY were together for just six days.

As the time drew near, preparations for the departure for Iceland occupied every one. Women were employed in piling salt for brine in the holds of the ships, and the men were getting the rigging in order; and at Yann's house his mother and sisters were working from morning till night, at their "sou'westers" and oilskins and the necessary outfit for the coming season. The weather was threatening; and the sea, under the breath of the equinox, was rough and troubled.

Gaud went through these inexorable preparations with anguish, counting the rapid hours of the day, as she waited for the evening, when work being over, she would have her Yann to herself.

Would he always be going away thus, in the years that were to come?

She hoped much that she would be able to discover some way of keeping him back, but now she did not dare to speak to him about it ; nevertheless, he loved her well. His feelings toward former sweethearts had been as nothing in comparison with this, nothing like the tenderness and the trust of their love for each other. And what charmed and surprised Gaud was to find him so sweet, so like a child, — this great Yann, whom she had seen sometimes at Paimpol putting on such a disdainful manner with the girls. To her, on the contrary, he showed always the same courtesy, which seemed natural to him ; and she adored the pleasant smile he gave her whenever their eyes met. Among the Breton people, there is always a sentiment of innate respect for the dignity of the wife. And yet Gaud was a little fearful in her happiness ; it was something she had so long despaired of that it seemed almost like a dream. And then, this love of Yann's, — would it last ?

Sometimes she remembered his dissipated life of old, his fits of violence, and his adventures, and was afraid. Would he always show her this infinite tenderness and this gentle courtesy ?

Truly, six days of married life was as nothing for a love like theirs, — nothing but a little feverish advance on their life's account, which might run on still for so many long years to come. They scarcely had time to see and talk to each other, and to understand that they really belonged to

each other. All their plans for their life together, their arrangements for housekeeping, and their hope of quiet happiness had to be put off until his return.

Oh, in those years to come, she would keep him at any price from going again to that dreadful Iceland!

But how was she going to manage it? How would they live, — they who were both so poor? And then he was so attached to his seafaring life!

She tried two or three times, in spite of everything, to restrain him, and with all the powers of her will and heart and mind. To be the wife of an Iceland fisherman, to await the approach of spring with sadness, to pass each summer in painful anxiety! No, now that she adored him as she had never believed it possible that she could, she was seized with a terror which was too great to be endured, when she thought of those years to come.

They had one spring day together, — one only. It was the day before he was to set sail; everything was in order on board, and Yann spent the whole day with her. They walked arm in arm together along the paths, like lovers, keeping close to each other and talking of a thousand things.

And people smiled as they saw them pass and said, “There’s Gaud and big Yann, of Pors-Even, who were married the other day.”

It was early springtime, on this last day of

theirs together, and it seemed something novel and strange to see the sudden calm and the usually stormy sky without a cloud. There was no wind from any quarter. The sea was mild, and was everywhere of the same light blue, and perfectly tranquil. The sun shone with a great white brilliancy; and the rude Breton country seemed to bathe itself in its radiance as in something fine and rare, seeming to smile and awake to new life as far as the eye could reach. The air was deliciously mild and smelt of summer; one would have said that it had been stilled forever, and that there would never be any more dark days or storms. The capes and bays, over which the changing shadows of the clouds no longer floated, stood out clear in the sunlight with their great immovable lines; and they too seemed to repose in endless peace and calm. And it all seemed to make sweeter and more eternal the springtide of their love. On the roadside they saw already little early flowers, primroses and violets, but pale and without fragrance.

When Gaud asked, —

“How long will you love me, Yann?” astonished, he replied, as he looked into her face with his beautiful honest eyes, —

“Why, always, Gaud.”

And this word spoken so simply by these untutored lips seemed to express in its deepest significance the eternity of love.

She leaned upon his arm, pressing closely to his side, in the enchantment of her realized dream, still fearful, and feeling that he would soon fly away like some great sea-bird. Tomorrow at wing on the ocean ! and now for this once it was too late ; she could do nothing to keep him back.

From the cliff-paths where they were walking they could overlook the whole sea-coast, which spread out before them, apparently without a tree, but carpeted with low-growing furze and strewn with rocks. The fishermen's huts, with their old quaint walls, stood out here and there among the rocks, with thatched roofs like high hunched backs, all green with new moss ; and in the far distance lay the sea like some great hazy vision describing its mighty circle, and seeming to hold everything in its everlasting embrace.

Gaud was amusing herself with telling him about the wonderful and astonishing sights of Paris, where she had lived ; but he very contemptuously declined to be interested. "So far from the coast !" he said, "and so much land, — so much land, — why, that must be unhealthy. So many houses, so many people ! There must be all kinds of evil diseases in these cities. I don't want to live there, — not I, — you may be sure."

And she smiled, astonished to see how much of the innocent child there was still left in this great fellow.

Sometimes they plunged into hollows among

the cliffs, where real trees were growing, seeming to cower there away from the ocean winds. Down there, there was no longer any view, but piles of dead leaves on the ground, while the air felt cold and damp. Sometimes the deep-cut path would wind along under the shadow of the trees ; and sometimes it would narrow down between the walls of some dark and lonely hamlet, sunken down and crumbling with age, sleeping in the depth of the hollow. And everywhere crucifixes rose high before them among lifeless branches, with their great wooden figures of Christ, mouldering away like corpses, with endless grimaces of pain.

And then the path would go up again, and once more they looked out upon the wide horizon, and breathed again the fresh air of the cliffs and the sea.

Yann, in his turn, was telling her about Iceland, its pale summers, its endless days, and its oblique and never-setting suns. Gaud did not understand it very well, and made him explain. "The sun goes all around, — all around," he said, waving his outstretched arm around the distant circle of the blue waters. "It always stays very low down, because, you see, it has no force to rise ; at midnight it drags its edge a little in the sea, but soon gets up again and takes up the same round once more. Sometimes the moon appears on the other side of the sky ; and then they both of them shine away, each on its own side, and you can hardly

tell them apart, they look so much alike in that part of the world."

"To see the sun at midnight!" How far off it must be, this island of Iceland! And the fiords, what are they? Gaud had read this word several times, together with the names of the dead inscribed in the chapel for shipwrecked sailors, and it seemed to her as if it must mean something very unlucky.

"Fiords," replied Yann, "are great bays, like this one here at Paimpol, only there are mountains all round them, so high, so high, that you can never see their tops on account of the clouds which cover them. A gloomy country enough, Gaud, I can assure you. Rocks and rocks and nothing but rocks, and the inhabitants of the island don't even know what a tree is. In the middle of August, when we have done fishing, it is high time to be leaving, for then the nights begin, and they get longer very fast. The sun sets behind the earth and can't rise up again; and then it's night the whole winter through.

"There's a little cemetery there too," he said, "on the shore near a fiord, quite like ours, for those from Ploubazlanec who may have died during the fishing season, or who have been lost at sea. It is consecrated ground just as much as here at Pors-Even; and the people who are buried there have wooden crosses with their names on them just like ours. The two Goazdiou, of Ploubazlanec,

are there, and also Guillaume Moan, Sylvestre's grandfather."

And she seemed to see the little cemetery at the foot of the desolate cape, bathed in the pale pink light of the endless days, and then she thought of these same dead sailors, lying under the ice and the black shroud of those nights which are as long as winters.

"And are you fishing the whole, whole time without ever resting?" she asked.

"The whole time; and then there's the sailing of the ship to see to. And the sea is not always so lovely off there. Lord! how tired we are when evening comes! we have an appetite for supper, I can tell you; some days we are fairly ravenous."

"Do you never weary of it?"

"Never," he said with an air of conviction which gave her pain. "On board, at sea, I never know how the time passes, never."

And then she bent her head with a deeper sadness, feeling more than ever conquered by the sea.





PART V.

CHAPTER I.

AT the close of this one spring day which they had spent together, a feeling of winter came on at night-fall ; and they went home to dine before a blazing fire of crackling branches.

Their last meal together !

But they had still one whole night more to sleep in each other's arms, and that knowledge still kept them from being sad.

After dinner, outside on the road to Pors-Even, they found that the pleasant feeling of spring was not quite gone after all, for the air was still and almost mild, and a few remaining twilight gleams lingered over the land.

They went to pay a visit to Yann's parents for him to bid them good-by, and came home to go to bed in good time, as they both intended to rise at daybreak.

CHAPTER II.

THE quay at Paimpol, the next morning, was crowded with people.

The Iceland boats had been leaving since the evening before, and with every tide a fresh lot put out to sea.

This morning fifteen boats, including the "Leopoldine," were to set sail; and the wives and mothers of the sailors were all there to see them off.

Gaud was almost astonished to find herself there among them all, — to realize that she too had become the wife of an Iclander, and that the same fateful reason had brought her there. Her destiny had developed with such precipitous haste within the last few days that she had scarcely had time to comprehend it all; and in gliding irresistibly down the steep declivity of her fate, she had found herself arrived at the inexorable result which she must endure for the present, like all the rest who were already accustomed to it. She had never before witnessed these farewells; everything was new and unfamiliar. None of the women were in any way like her; and she felt lonely and strange. The fact that they had been accustomed to think of her as a lady still

remained in their minds in spite of everything, and set her apart from them.

The weather remained fine on this day of parting, only out at sea a heavy ground-swell, rolling in from the west, foretold bad weather ; and in the distance the ocean which was awaiting them all could be seen breaking on the rocks outside the harbor.

Around Gaud there were others, who like her were very pretty and very touching, with their eyes filled with tears ; and some, too, who were laughing and indifferent, and either heartless or, for the moment, not in love with any one.

Old women were there, who, feeling the approach of death, were weeping as they bade their sons good-by, and lovers kissing each other long and tenderly ; some grizzled, weather-beaten sailors could be heard singing loudly to keep up their courage, while others went on board with a gloomy look as if starting to do a penance. Some poor fellows who had been tricked into signing an engagement while half drunk in some wine-shop were now treated roughly enough ; and their own wives were helping the gendarmes to push them on board.

Others who they had been afraid might give trouble on account of their tremendous strength, had been deliberately made drunk, and were being carried in wheelbarrows into the hold of the ship, where they were tumbled down like so many dead men.

Gaud was terrified when she saw them. With what sort of company was her Yann going to live? And then what kind of a trade was this Iceland fishing, to begin in such a way, and to inspire these men with such aversion?

But there were also some sailors who smiled, and who doubtless loved this life on the open sea and the fishing, just as Yann did. These were the good sailors, who carried themselves in a hearty, courageous way. If they were bachelors, they went off carelessly enough with a parting glance at the girls; or if they were married men, they kissed their wives and little ones with a gentle sadness, hoping to return home with more money in their pockets.

Gaud felt somewhat reassured when she saw that all those on board the "*Leopoldine*" were like this, and that this vessel really had a picked crew.

The ships drew off in twos and fours, towed outside by tugs. And as they moved along, the sailors took off their caps and chanted in a loud voice the hymn to the Virgin, — "*Hail, Star of the Sea!*" — and on the quay, women's hands were waved in last farewells, and tears fell over the muslin strings of their caps.

When the "*Leopoldine*" had gone, Gaud walked along quickly toward the Gaos' house; and after an hour and a half's rapid walking along the coast by the familiar paths of Ploubazlanec,

she found herself with her new relatives, off there at the other end of the district.

The "Leopoldine" was to drop anchor outside the roadstead of Pors-Even, and was not really to set sail until evening ; and so it was there that Yann and Gaud had arranged their last meeting, and in fact, he did come back to her in the yawl of his ship, came back for three hours to bid her good-by.

On shore, away from the heavy swell, there was no change in the beautiful spring weather ; and the sky was still of the same quiet blue.

They started along the path, arm in arm, and it made them think of their lovely walk of the day before, only now they could no longer look forward to the night together ; they walked aimlessly along, turning back toward Paimpol, and soon they found themselves near home. Without thinking, their steps had insensibly brought them thither ; and they went for just once more into their little cottage, where Grandmother Yvonne was amazed to see them reappearing together.

Yann gave Gaud little directions in regard to different things he had left in the wardrobe, particularly about his beautiful wedding suit, asking her to unfold it once in a while and hang it in the sun. On board men-of-war the sailors learn to be very particular about their things. And Gaud smiled as he made known his wishes ; he could be very sure that everything that belonged to him would be kept and taken care of with all possible affection. But these little matters were quite

secondary ; they talked for the sake of talking, to divert each other.

Yann was telling her how on board the "Leopoldine" they had just been casting lots for the fishing-posts, and that he was very much pleased at having drawn one of the best ; and she made him explain to her what that meant, as she knew almost nothing about his trade.

"You see, Gaud," he said, "on the deck of our ships holes are bored at certain intervals which we call 'reel-holes ;' and that's where we put the little rollers over which our lines run. So before we start we throw dice for these holes, or just as likely cast lots with brass numbers in the cabin-boy's cap ; and the hole that each one gets, he keeps for the whole season. Nobody has any right to put his line anywhere else ; there's never any change. Well, my post is at the stern of the boat, which is the place where the most fish are to be caught, as you can understand ; and then it's near the shrouds, and you can easily tack on a piece of canvas or an oilskin so as to make a little shelter for your face against the snow and the hail out there, and it's very useful, I can assure you. You don't get your skin so burned during the nasty black squalls ; and your eyes see clearly ever so much longer."

They spoke low to each other, very low, as if afraid of frightening away the last moments which were left to them, or of making the time fly faster.

Their conversation had that peculiar character which everything has which must soon be ended ; and the smallest and most insignificant things they said seemed on that day to have a mysterious and momentous significance.

At the last moment Yann took his wife up in his arms, and they clasped each other mutely in a long embrace. Then he went aboard ; and the gray sails were spread out to catch the light breeze which was blowing up from the west. She could recognize him still ; and he waved his cap to her, as they had arranged. And long she looked upon her Yann as, like a shadow on the sea, he vanished in the distance. It was still he, that little human figure standing up black against the gray-blue waters, already indistinct, and finally lost in the distance, where the eyes which still looked could see no more.

And as the "*Leopoldine*" gradually drew away, Gaud, drawn on as by a magnet, followed on foot along the cliffs. She would soon have to stop, because she had come to the end of the promontory ; so she sat down at the foot of the last great cross which stood there among the rocks and furze. As it was at a high point in the cliffs, the sea seemed to rise in the distance ; and it looked as if the "*Leopoldine*," as she retreated, rose, little by little, growing ever smaller along the slope of the mighty circle. The waves rolled up in great slow undulations, the last remnant of some mighty storm which had wreaked its fury

elsewhere beyond the horizon ; but in the wide field of view where she still could discern Yann's ship all was calm and quiet.

Gaud still gazed on, trying to fix in her memory the look of the ship, the shape of its sails and hull, so that she could recognize it from afar when she should come to this same place again to wait for it to reappear.

Great rolling waves continued to come in from the west regularly one after the other, ceaselessly and relentlessly, still renewing their futile striving, and breaking over the same rocks, spreading out over the same places in the sandy beach. And finally this sullen agitation of the sea came to have a strange look, contrasted with the mild serenity of air and sky. It seemed as if the depths of the ocean were overflowing and trying to overrun and invade the land.

But the "Leopoldine" grew smaller and smaller as she sank out of sight. She was undoubtedly being carried along by some current, for the wind was very light that evening ; and still she was rapidly getting farther and farther away. She had become now nothing but a little gray spot, hardly more than a point ; she would soon reach the extreme edge of the visible world and cross over into that infinite beyond, over which the darkness was already beginning to gather.

By seven o'clock in the evening night had come, the ship had disappeared ; and Gaud went home, courageous enough on the whole, in spite

of the tears which would come. But what a difference there was now, and how much greater emptiness would he have left behind, if he had gone away as he had done the two years before, without even bidding her good-by! Now that everything was changed, and the pain so mitigated, since he was really her own, she felt herself so surrounded by his love, in spite of his departure, that as she went home alone she was almost consoled by the delicious anticipation of their meeting again in the autumn.

CHAPTER III.

THE summer went by, warm, quiet, and sad, the first yellow leaves, the gathering of the swallows, the first chrysanthemums bringing joy to her heart.

By the packet boats to Reikiavik, and by the messenger boats, she sent him several letters; but she never could be sure that they reached him.

At the end of July she received a letter from him telling her that he was in good health on the 10th of that month, that the season's fishing promised to be excellent, and that he already had fifteen hundred fish as his share. From one end to the other it was written in that innocently con-

ventional style of all the letters Icelanders write to their families. Men brought up like Yann are completely ignorant of how to express the thousand little things which they think and feel and desire. But as she was more educated than he, she could do that partly for herself, and could read between the lines the deep tenderness which he had not expressed. Several times in the course of the letter he called her "wife," as if he took pleasure in repeating the name; and then the address alone, "*À Madame Marguerite Gaos, Maison Moan en Ploubazlanec,*" was in itself a thing to be read and re-read with joy. She had had so little time in which to be called Madame Marguerite Gaos.

CHAPTER IV.

GAUD worked very hard during these summer months. The women of Paimpol, who were doubtful at first of her capacity for work, saying that her hands were too pretty and too like a young lady's, had discovered that on the contrary she could make their figures look better than any one else could, and she had almost become a fashionable dressmaker.

What she earned went to beautify the cottage for his return. The wardrobe and the old cup-

board-beds were mended and varnished and fitted with bright new locks. She had put new glass into the dormer-window which looked out on the sea, and had hung curtains before it, and bought a new coverlet for the winter, a table, and some chairs.

All this she had done without touching the money which Yann had left her when he went away, and which she was keeping intact in a little Chinese box to show him when he returned.

During the summer evenings while the light lasted she would sit before the door with Grandmother Yvonne, whose head was much clearer during the warm weather, knitting a beautiful fisherman's jersey in blue wool for Yann. There were borders on the cuffs and collar in wonderfully complicated open stitches. Grandmother Yvonne, who had been famous for knitting in her day, had, little by little, remembered how she used to do the various stitches in her youth, in order to teach them to Gaud; and it was a piece of work which took a great deal of wool, for Yann needed a very big jersey.

But soon, particularly toward evening, they began to feel that the days were growing shorter. Certain plants which had finished blooming in July began to look yellow already, and small pale violets on long stems started up again by the roadside; finally the last days of August arrived, and one evening, off the point of Pors-Even, the first Iceland boat hove in sight.

Everybody rushed to the cliff to welcome it. Which one was it?

"It's the 'Samuel Azénide,'—it's always ahead!"

"The 'Leopoldine' won't be far behind, that's sure," said Yann's old father. "I know how it is out there; when one starts, the others can't stay behind."

CHAPTER V.

THE Icelanders were all coming back. Two came in on the second day, four the day after that, and then twelve within the next week. And happiness returned with them throughout the land; and it was holiday for the wives and mothers, holiday also in the wine-shops where the pretty Paimpol girls were waiting on the fishermen while they drank.

The "Leopoldine" was among the tardy ones; there were still ten which had not arrived. She could not delay much longer; and Gaud was in a state of delicious excitement at the idea that at the end of the week which she had given herself, so as not to be disappointed, Yann would be there. She kept the house in wonderful order, and everything very clean and neat, ready to receive him. When everything was arranged, there was nothing more to do; and besides, she had

not much thought left for important things, in her impatience.

Three of the tardy boats came into port, and then five more. There were only two now that were wanting.

“So,” they laughed, “this year it’s either the ‘Leopoldine’ or the ‘Marie Jeanne’ who will bring up the rear.”

And Gaud began to laugh too, excited and prettier than ever in her expectant joy.

CHAPTER VI.

BUT the days went on.

Gaud continued to dress herself carefully, to put on a gay and careless air, and go to the quay to talk with the others.

She kept saying that it was perfectly natural, — the delay. Was it not what happened every year? And then such good sailors! and two such good boats!

But in the evening, when she had gotten home again, she began to feel just a little worried and anxious. Could it be possible that she was afraid so soon? Was there any reason for it? And then she grew frightened because she had been afraid.

CHAPTER VII.

THE 10th of September, — how the days flew by !

One morning, when there was already a cold mist over the ground, — a real autumn morning, — the rising sun found her seated in the porch of the chapel for shipwrecked sailors, in the place where the widows came to say their prayers, seated motionless, with eyes fixed and temples bound as with a band of iron.

For two days past the melancholy morning mists had begun to rise ; and on this morning Gaud awoke with a sharper anxiety, on account of the feeling of winter in the air. What was there about this day, this hour, this minute, different from the preceding ones ? Sometimes boats are a whole fortnight late, sometimes even a month.

But there was something peculiar about this morning, surely, since for the first time she had come to sit in the porch of this chapel, and to re-read the names of these dead sailors.

In memory of

GAOS, MOAN,

lost at sea, near the northern fiord —

A great shuddering blast came roaring up from the sea, and at the same time something fell on the roof like rain, — dead leaves. A whole

shower of them blew into the porch. The old trees, shaken by the ocean wind, were shedding their foliage. Winter was coming —

Lost at sea,
near the northern fiord,
in the tempest of the 4 and 5 of Aug., 1880.

She read it mechanically, while through the grating of the door her eyes searched the ocean's distances. This morning it seemed vague and indistinct under the gray mist, and a heavy bank of fog hung over the horizon like a mourning veil.

Another blast, and more dead leaves came fluttering in, — a stronger gust this time, as if the west wind, which had already scattered the bodies of these men over the sea, wished to disturb even these inscriptions, which recalled their names to those who were yet alive.

In spite of herself, Gaud's eyes were again and again drawn to an empty space in the wall, which seemed to be waiting to be filled. She was pursued with a terrible persistence by the thought of a new tablet which might soon have to be put there, bearing another name, which even in spirit she dared not breathe in such a place.

She shivered as she sat on the granite bench, with her head leaning against the stone wall.

Lost near the northern fiord,
in the tempest of the 4 and 5 of Aug.,
aged 23 years.
May he rest in peace !

A vision of Iceland and its little cemetery came to her mind, — that distant, distant Iceland, lit up at midnight by the low-lying sun. And then suddenly, always in that same empty space which seemed to be waiting, she saw again with horrible distinctness the new tablet of which she had been thinking, — a fresh tablet, with a skull and cross-bones, and in the middle, as if written in letters of fire, a name, that adored name, YANN GAOS ! And then she stood up, and uttered a hoarse cry like one insane.

Outside, the gray mist of morning still lingered over the land, and the dead leaves still blew fluttering in.

Steps along the path. Who could be coming ? She stood up very straight, and with a quick movement arranged her cap, and tried to compose her face. The steps were getting nearer ; some one was coming in. And she quickly assumed the manner of one who had also come there by chance, — not willing yet, for anything in the world, to seem like the wife of a shipwrecked sailor.

But it was Fante Floury, the wife of the “ Leopoldine’s ” second mate, and she understood immediately what Gaud was doing there ; it was needless to try to deceive her. First the two women stood silently facing each other, their terror intensified at having met in this way, almost hating each other for being there. And then, “ All those of Tréguier and Saint Brieuc have

been back for a week," Fante finally said pitilessly, in a sullen voice, as if annoyed; she was bringing a taper to make a vow.

Oh, yes, a vow! Gaud had preferred not to think about this last resort of the unfortunate. But she went into the chapel behind Fante without speaking; and they knelt down together like two sisters. And there they repeated the prayers to the "Virgin, Star of the Sea" with all their souls. And soon there was nothing to be heard but the sound of their sobbing, and their tears began to rain down upon the ground.

They arose calmer and more confident. Fante helped the trembling Gaud to rise, and put her arms about her and kissed her.

And then, having dried their tears, arranged their hair, brushed the saltpetre and the dust of the stones from their skirts where they had knelt, they went on their different ways without another word.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE end of September this year was like a second summer except for the sadness which was in the air. It was really such beautiful weather that if it had not been for the dead leaves which fell mournfully in showers by the roadside, it would have seemed like the merry month of June.

Husbands, lovers, and sweethearts had come back, and everywhere was the joy of a second springtide of love.

Finally, one day, one of the two boats which were over-due was signalled off the coast. But which?

Groups of women quickly gathered on the cliff in mute anxiety.

Gaud was there, pale and trembling, beside her Yann's father.

"I really believe," said the old fisherman, "I believe it's they! — a red pennant and a balloon topsail; it looks wonderfully like them. What do you say, Gaud, my girl?"

"And yet, no," he said with sudden disappointment, — "no, we are deceived again; the bowsprit is not like theirs, and they have a flying jib. So it's not they this time, it's the 'Marie Jeanne;' but they can't be long now, my dear."

And day followed day, and every night came in its due time, with inexorable monotony.

Gaud was almost foolishly particular about her dress, for fear of looking like the wife of a lost sailor, and was angry when the others spoke to her with half-expressed compassion, turning away her eyes so as not to meet the pitying looks which made her heart stand still.

She had taken lately to going every morning to the high cliff of Pors-Even, at the very end of the coast, passing behind the house of Yann's father so that his mother and little sisters should not see

her. She would go all alone to this last extreme point in the country of Ploubazlanec, where the cliff cuts into the gray waters of the Channel like the horn of a reindeer, and would sit there the whole day long at the foot of the lonely cross, which overlooks the mighty expanse of waters. There are many such granite crosses standing out on the bold jutting cliffs of this sea-shore, as if asking for pity from this restless mysterious thing which draws men to her and never gives them back, keeping by preference the best and bravest for herself.

About this cross of Pors-Even, the fields were ever green with their carpet of short green furze ; and at this height, the sea-air was very pure, with scarce a trace of the salt smell of seaweed, but filled with the delicious fragrance of September.

All the irregularities of the coast could be seen from this point, jutting out one after the other in the distance. The shore in this land of Brittany ends off in rugged points which stretch far out into the tranquil emptiness of the waters. Just at the edge the mirror of the sea crumbles on the rocks, but beyond, nothing disturbs its polished surface, and a gentle caressing sound, low but all-pervading, comes up from the foot of all the cliffs. And how calm were these wide waters, how lucid these mighty depths ! The great blue waste, the tomb of the ill-fated Gaoses, guarded ever its impenetrable mystery, while the breezes, as feeble as

a sigh, scattered abroad the odor of the low heather, which bloomed again in this last autumn sunshine.

When the tide went out, deep and ever-widening spots were left along the shore, as if the waters of the Channel were slowly vanishing; and then with the same slow movement the waters rose again, and continued their endless washing to and fro without a thought of the silent dead below.

And Gaud remained there, seated at the foot of the cross, in the midst of the deep stillness, until the night came and she could see no more.

CHAPTER IX.

THE end of September had come. She no longer ate; she no longer slept.

And now she remained at home, bent over, with her hands between her knees, her head leaning against the granite wall. Why should she get up? Why should she go to bed? She threw herself on her bed without undressing, when she was too exhausted to sit up longer. Otherwise she remained there perfectly still, and almost stupefied, her teeth chattering as if with cold, and with this feeling as of a band of iron about her temples. Her face was drawn, and her mouth was dry and feverish; and sometimes she uttered

a hoarse groan in her throat, over and over for hours together, while she beat her head against the granite wall.

And then she would call Yann by his name with words of love, — very tenderly in a low voice, as if he were quite near to her ; and it sometimes happened that she would think of other things, little insignificant things, amusing herself, for instance, in watching the shadows of the china Virgin and the holy-water basin gradually lengthening, as the light declined, along the high wood-work of her bed. And then her agony would return to her more horrible than ever, and she would begin that cry again, and beat her head against the wall.

And all the hours of the day went by, one after the other, and all the hours of the night and all those of the morning. When she counted up how long a time had gone by since he ought to have been back, she was seized with an unendurable terror ; and she no longer wished to know the dates or the names of the days as they passed.

There are usually some signs of shipwrecks in Iceland ; those who return have seen the tragedy from afar, or have probably found some pieces of the wreck, or a floating body, — some indication which tells the story. But, no ! no one had seen or heard anything of the “ Leopoldine.” The crew of the “ Marie Jeanne,” who were the last who had seen her, on the 2d of August, said that

she was then going to fish farther up toward the north ; and after this all was lost in impenetrable mystery.

To wait, always to wait, without ever knowing anything ! When would the moment come when she would really wait no more ? She did not know even that, and now she almost wished that she soon might —

Oh, if he were dead, why, at least was not some one pitiful enough to tell her so ? Oh, to see him — wherever he was at this moment — to see him, or what remained of him ! If only the Virgin to whom she had prayed so long would grant her by a sort of second sight a vision of him, of her Yann ! — of him alive, sailing his boat toward home, or at least his body tossed by the sea !

Sometimes the vision of a sail rising on the horizon would suddenly come to her, — the “*Leopoldine*” approaching, hastening to get in ! And then she would make an unconscious movement to get up, to run out, to look over the ocean to see if it were true. But she would fall back in her seat again. Alas ! where was she at this moment, — the “*Leopoldine*,” — where was she likely to be ?

Off there, doubtless, in that terribly distant Iceland, deserted and wrecked and lost. And it always ended with another vision, the same which ever relentlessly pursued her, — a dismantled and empty wreck, cradled on a silent sea of

rosy gray, cradled gently, silently, tenderly, as if in mockery, in the still solitude of those lifeless waters.

CHAPTER X.

Two o'clock in the morning. It was at night particularly that Gaud listened to every approaching step. At the least murmur, at the slightest unaccustomed sound, her temples throbbed ; and her nerves had so long been overstrained that the least noise was agony to her.

Two o'clock in the morning. On this night, as on all the others, she was lying with her hands clasped and eyes open in the darkness, listening to the sound of the wind sighing its ceaseless complaint along the shore. Suddenly a man's steps ! — steps hastening along the road. At such an hour who could be passing ? She raised herself in bed, stirred to the depths of her soul, while her heart ceased its beating.

Some one stopped before the door, and was mounting the little stone steps.

He — oh, joy of heaven ! — he ! Some one had knocked ; it could be no one else. She was out of bed in her bare feet ; she, so feeble for so many days, jumped out as nimbly as a cat, with arms outstretched to embrace her beloved. Doubtless the "Leopoldine" had arrived in the

night, and had anchored off the bay of Pors-Even, and he was rushing to come to her. She arranged all this in her head with the rapidity of lightning, and now she was breaking her nails on the fastening of the door, in her mad haste to slide back the rusty bolt.

Ah! — and then she slowly recoiled, sinking down with her head fallen on her breast. Her beautiful, foolish dream was over. It was only Fantic, their neighbor. By the time she well understood that it was not he, that no sign of her Yann had passed by in the night, she had fallen again by degrees into the same gulf, — to the same depths of awful despair. Poor Fantic apologized. His wife, as she knew, was at her very worst at present, and their child was choking in its cradle with the croup; and he had come to ask for help while he ran to Paimpol for a doctor.

What difference did all that make to her? She had become almost savage in her grief, and had no longer any thought for the troubles of others. Sunk on a bench before him, with her eyes fixed as if she were dead, she neither spoke, nor listened, nor looked at him. What did it matter to her what the man was saying?

And then he understood why she had opened the door so quickly for him, was sorry for the pain he had caused her, and began to stammer out an apology. True, he ought not to have disturbed her, — not her.

“Not me?” replied Gaud, quickly; “and why not me, Fantic?”

Life suddenly returned to her with the fear of being thought by others to despair. She would not endure that yet. And then, in her turn, she was sorry for him; so she dressed herself and followed him, finding strength enough to go and take care of his little child.

When she came back, to throw herself on her bed at four o'clock, she fell asleep for a moment, because she was tired out.

But this one instant of great joy had left an impression on her mind which still remained in spite of everything. She awoke soon with a shock, half rising out of her bed, at the remembrance of something. There had been some news about her Yann; and in the confusion of ideas which came into her head, she tried quickly to recall what it was.

Ah, nothing, alas!—no, nothing but Fantic; and a second time she fell into the depths of her old despair. No; in reality nothing had happened to change her dull and hopeless waiting. But to have thought that he was so near,—it was as if some message from his spirit had come to float in the air about her. It seemed like what they called in Brittany a “warning;” and she listened more carefully still to all the steps outside, believing that somebody would come who would speak of him.

And in fact, when it was daylight, Yann's father did come to see her. He took off his cap, brushed back his beautiful white hair, which was curly like his son's, and sat down by Gaud's bed. His heart was torn with anguish too, for his Yann, his handsome Yann, was his eldest, his favorite, and his pride. But he did not despair, — no, really he did not yet despair ; and he began to reassure Gaud in a very tender way. In the first place, those who had last come back from Iceland all told of very heavy fogs which might easily have delayed the ship, and then, besides, he had had an idea they might very possibly have stopped at the Feroë Islands, which lie far northward on the route, and whence letters are very long in coming. The same thing had happened to him forty years ago, and his poor dead mother had already had Mass read for his soul. Such a good ship she was, — the "Leopoldine," — almost new, and with such a good crew on board !

Old Mother Moan prowled about them, shaking her head. Her grandchild's trouble had almost given her back her strength and her mental faculties. And she took care of the house, looking from time to time, as she went about, at the yellowing little photograph of her Sylvestre, hanging on the granite wall, with its anchors and its mourning wreath of black pearls ; but since this seafaring life had deprived her of her last grandson, she no longer had any faith in the return of any sailor. She only prayed to the Virgin now

from fear, with her poor old lips only, guarding an unforgetting bitterness ever in her heart.

But Gaud listened eagerly to all these consoling words, her great eyes with their black circles regarding with deep tenderness this old man who looked so like her love. Only to have him there next to her seemed like a protection against death, and she felt more hopeful, and as if Yann were nearer to her; and as her tears fell silently and with greater calmness, she began to say over again to herself her ardent prayers to the "Virgin, Star of the Sea."

They had stopped off there in those islands, to repair damages perhaps; it was indeed quite possible.

Gaud got up, braided her hair, and made a kind of toilet, as if he really might be coming back. Surely, all hope was not lost, since he, his father, did not despair; and for several days she began to look for Yann again.

It was full autumn, late autumn; and there were sombre twilights, when it soon grew dark in the old cottage, and dark also all about in the old Breton country. The days themselves seemed scarcely more than twilights, and the clouds which floated slowly by often made it quite dark at noon-day.

The wind roared ceaselessly, like the distant sound of great church organs playing ominous or despairing tunes, or at other times rushed up against the door, raging like a wild beast.

Gaud had become pale, so pale, looking all the time more weak and worn, as if age had already brushed her with its plumeless wing. Very often she would look over Yann's things, — his beautiful wedding clothes, — folding them and unfolding them like a mad-woman, and particularly one of his blue woollen jerseys which still kept the shape of his body. When she threw it gently on the table, it fell naturally into the contour of his shoulders and chest. And finally she put it alone in a drawer in the wardrobe, not wishing to stir it again, for fear of its losing that impression the sooner, if disturbed.

Every evening cold fogs drove up across the shore ; and she looked out of her window over the melancholy country, watching the little puffs of white smoke beginning to rise here and there from the cottages of the neighbors. There everywhere the men had returned like wandering birds brought back by the cold ; and before many a hearth-fire pleasant evenings would be spent, for the revival of love had come again with winter throughout all this country of the Icelanders.

Clutching at the thought of those islands where he might be stopping, she began, as it were, to hope again, and once more to expect him.

CHAPTER XI.

YANN never came back.

One August night out there off the coast of sombre Iceland, in the midst of a great fury of sound had been celebrated his marriage with the sea, — with the sea which had formerly been his nurse. It was she who had cradled him, who had made him a strong and broad-chested youth, and had then taken him in his magnificent manhood for herself alone. A profound mystery had enveloped these monstrous nuptials. Dark veils were shaken constantly above them, curtains moving and twisted, stretched there to hide the feast; and the bride had given voice, making all the time her most horrible loud noise to drown the cries.

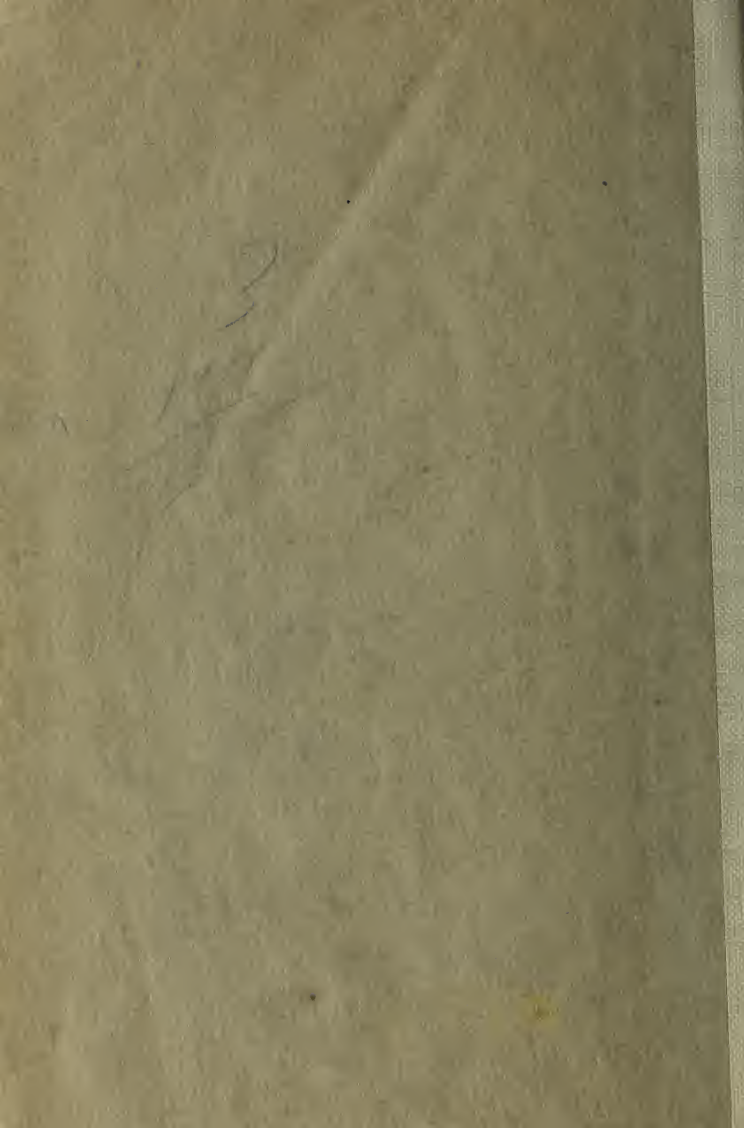
And he, remembering Gaud, his wife of flesh, had defended himself, struggling like a giant, against this spouse, which was the tomb, until the moment when he gave himself up, his arms open to receive her, with a great deep cry like the death-roar of a bull, his mouth already filled with water, his arms open, outstretched and stiff forever.

And they were all there at the wedding, all those whom Yann had before invited, — all except Sylvestre, who had gone off to sleep in enchanted gardens far away, on the other side of the world.

THE END.







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